

THE ARGOSY.

NOVEMBER, 1890.

THE HOUSE OF HALLIWELL.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXIX.

OLD FACES.

THE family at Halliwell House were assembled in the drawing-room one Sunday afternoon in the Christmas holidays. Miss Halliwell was seated in her place at the head of the table, and Mary Goring was opposite to her, in her Aunt Lucy's seat, cutting up oranges for the children, the little Gorings and three or four pupils who were staying the holidays. They used to like to take dessert on a Sunday afternoon in the drawing room, as it had a pleasant look-out upon the road. Lucy was suffering from one of her acute headaches, and sat near the fire in the old arm-chair of Mrs. Halliwell. It was very grand now, for the young ladies had worked a handsome covering for it. Mary was nearly eighteen now; a slender, graceful girl, far more beautiful than her ill-fated mother had been.

"There's such a pretty carriage at the gate, auntie," cried little John Goring, who was standing at the window.

"Not at our gate, child," said Hester; for they rarely had visitors on a Sunday. Nevertheless, she turned in her chair, and looked out.

It was certainly at their gate. A low, stylish landau, with glittering silver ornaments on the horses' harness. A lady in purple velvet and furs was in it, and the footman was ringing at the gate. Presently Susan, Dr. Goring's old servant, came up and handed her mistress a card, saying the lady wished to know if she could speak with her.

"Give it to Miss Goring," said Hester, for her glasses were not at hand, and her eyes were growing rather dim for small print without them. "What does it say, Mary?"

"Lady Elliot," answered Mary, reading from the card.

"Who is 'Lady Elliot'?" exclaimed Lucy. "What can she want with us? Some mistake, perhaps."

"She asked for Miss Halliwell," said Susan. "Shall I show her up here, ma'am?"

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Hester. "But—with these cakes and oranges and glasses about—and the children! Show her into the dining-room, Susan."

Hester followed Susan downstairs, and the lady came in. A pale, delicate woman, with hair quite grey, though she did not look past forty.

"You have a young lady at school with you, a Miss Beale," she began, sitting down away from the fire, and removing the sable fur from her neck.

"Oh, yes," answered Hester; "and a dear girl she is. She has been with us five years. But she is not here to-day; she is spending a week with some relatives in Eaton Square. Captain and Mrs. Beale are in India."

"The relatives she is with are friends of mine," returned Lady Elliot; "and I have heard so pleasing an account of your establishment, of the comforts your young ladies enjoy, and the care bestowed on them, that I have been induced to think of placing my daughter with you."

"I am sure we feel much obliged to you," said Hester, in her own simple, courteous way. "If you should decide to entrust us with the young lady, we will do everything in our power for her happiness and welfare."

"She requires peculiar care; more care and attention than others. But for extra trouble I should of course expect to give extra remuneration."

"Is she not in good health?"

"Very good health, robust health; but"—Lady Elliot suddenly stopped, and then went on hurriedly—"the subject is naturally a painful one to me, and when I allude to it I am apt to become agitated."

Hester looked at her in astonishment. Her pale cheeks had turned crimson, her breath was laboured, and her hand, as she played with the fur boa she held, was moving nervously. Hester did not know what to say, so sat silent.

"The fact is her mind is not quite right. Her intellects ——"

"Oh," Hester interrupted, speaking, in the surprise of the moment, quicker than she might have done, "do not pain yourself by saying more. I fear if the poor young lady is like that it would not be possible to receive her here."

"She is not insane," answered Lady Elliot; "you must not think I have mistaken your house for an asylum; but she is *silly*. Some days she is so rational that a stranger would not observe anything to be the matter with her; she will learn her lessons and sew, and practise—for by dint of perseverance we have managed to teach her a little music. Other days she will be childish and silly; but I can assure you there is no madness, no insanity; it is only a weakness of intellect."

"How old is she?"

"She is sixteen. The medical men have recently suggested that were she placed at school with other young ladies, their companionship and example might tend to brighten her intellects. My husband is also of the same opinion. You know him by reputation, I presume."

"No; I am not aware ——"

"Sir Thomas Elliot, of —— Square."

"Sir Thomas Elliot, the great physician!" echoed Hester. "Oh, yes, I know him. Some months ago I took one of our pupils to him three or four times."

"He is my husband," returned Lady Elliot. "This child is our only daughter, and has been a source of great grief to us. When we first discovered her deficiency, as an infant, we believed the affliction to be much worse than it really was; we feared her to be a hopeless idiot; at least I did, for mothers in such a case can only look at the worst side. I thought, when the fatal truth burst upon us, that the shock, the horror, the grief would have killed me. I fear I loved the child too much, with a selfish, inordinate affection: three little daughters before her had died off, one by one, rendering this last more ardently coveted, and, when it came, too fondly cherished. But that hopeless despair—for it was nothing less—has calmed down with years; and though I cannot say I am happy in my child, I am more so than I once thought I ever could be. Let me beg of you to receive her."

The further conversation need not be related, nor the arrangements that were entered into. Hester consented to receive Miss Elliot, upon the understanding that should her peculiarities prove such as to draw the attention of the other pupils from their studies she should at once leave.

The reader cannot have forgotten Tom Elliot, the random infirmity pupil, or Dr. Elliot, the physician. He had remained in Wexborough for some years, after we last saw him there, struggling on; then by the death of Mrs. Turnbull (once Clara Freer) he and his wife were placed in affluent circumstances. Squire Turnbull had died early, and Mrs. Turnbull remained at Turnbull Park with William Elliot. The next to die was lawyer Freer: he left the whole of his money to Mrs. Turnbull unconditionally, and when she died, not many years subsequently, she left her father's property to Dr. and Mrs. Elliot, the greater portion of it to go to William at their death. A small sum she secured absolutely to William, to become his when he came of age. The Elliots had then removed to London, and the tide of luck had set in for Dr. Elliot. How he got the name he could hardly have told himself, but he did get it, and rich patients flocked to him by dozens and by scores. The tide still went on, and one red-letter day Dr. Elliot was bade to kneel down before her Majesty, and rose up Sir Thomas.

Lady Elliot left Halliwell House, and Hester returned upstairs again. She told Lucy and Miss Goring the purport of her visit—at least as much of it as she chose to tell before the children.

"What made Lady Elliot come this afternoon?" asked Lucy.

Hester did not know, for Lady Elliot had offered no explanation or apology. "There are some people who regard Sunday with little more reverence than week-days," Hester observed. "Perhaps Lady Elliot is one of them."

"I know what our nurse used to say—that business transacted on a Sunday would never prosper," interposed Frances Goring. "And Miss Howard, one day when she heard her ——"

"Don't mention Miss Howard's name, Frances," interrupted Mary quickly; "you have been told of that several times."

Frances was apt to be forgetful. Besides, she did not comprehend the full horror which had been brought into the family by Miss Howard.

The second week after the school assembled, Miss Elliot came. Lady Elliot did not bring her, she was ill with a cold, but, to the very great surprise of Hester and Lucy, Miss Graves did—Miss Graves who had formerly lodged with them. They found she was residing with Lady Elliot as companion, or, rather, over-watcher of her daughter. They scarcely knew her, she was looking so stout and well, but she had aged a great deal and had taken to wearing caps. They had been curious to see Miss Elliot, and found her a short, slight girl, with a small, simpering, vacant face, prominent blue eyes and dark hair.

Mary Goring linked Miss Elliot's arm within hers and led her into the school-room. The pupils were just going to tea, and Miss Elliot, without the ceremony of being asked, sat down with them, making herself perfectly at home. Miss Graves took it in the dining-room with Hester and Lucy.

"Mrs. Archer is connected by marriage with Sir Thomas Elliot," she explained, "and that is how I obtained the situation."

Her words did not strike particularly upon Hester's mind at the moment, and Miss Graves went on. "I told Lady Elliot how comfortable Clara would be with you, as soon as I heard she had a notion of placing her here. Which is but recently, I fancy: the plan seems to have been made up all in a hurry."

"What a terrible affliction to have a child like Miss Elliot!" uttered Lucy.

"Terrible I believe it was to Lady Elliot in the first years, by all I can gather," answered Miss Graves. "She was not the rich Lady Elliot then; quite the contrary. Sir Thomas was only Dr. Elliot, an obscure country physician, little known or employed; it is but within these few years that he has come out the great medical star, knighted by the Queen, and run after by every invalid. Many a physician, making his annual thousands, has had to struggle with an early career

of poverty, and Thomas Elliot was one. You have not forgotten my sister's husband, Miss Halliwell, the Reverend George Archer?"

Had Hester forgotten him! A blush rose to her stupid old face—as she was wont to call it; though indeed everyone knew that it was anything but stupid, or old either—and they might have seen it through the ascending steam as she poured out the tea. Perhaps Lucy did. She quietly answered that she had not forgotten him.

"His mother and this Sir Thomas Elliot's father were sister and brother. He was a country clergyman."

Here was another recollection awakened. How often had Hester in those old sunny days heard George speak of his aunt and uncle Elliot. She had little thought in her interviews with the renowned Sir Thomas Elliot, touching the health of one of her pupils, that she was speaking with the cousin of George Archer.

"And Tom Elliot—as Sir Thomas, stiff and stately as he is now, was then called—ran away with a young lady, and married her," proceeded Miss Graves. "Her father never forgave them, and left all his money to his eldest daughter; but she, when she died—she died young—bequeathed it to the Elliots. Since then Dr. Elliot has been a rising man."

"He must be an unusually clever man in his profession," remarked Lucy Halliwell. "Everyone says so."

"Not he," answered Miss Graves; "not a whit more clever than others, only the run of luck is upon him. He has contrived to obtain the name to be just now the fashionable physician of the day, and so crowds flock after him."

"Well, he must be a happy man, at any rate," repeated Lucy, "to see himself so successful after his early struggles."

"Not so fast there," rejoined Miss Graves, significantly; "they neither of them give me the idea of being too happy. Sir Thomas is a gloomy, austere man, who seems to have no enjoyment in life; and no recreation, save that of giving advice to patients. They say he was a wild, rattling young fellow in youth, whom every lady liked; but if so, he is strangely altered. And Lady Elliot looks and moves as if she had a continual load of care upon her. I say to myself sometimes that one might as well be in a convent as with them, for they will both sit in the room for hours and never speak. If it were not for Mr. William, I believe they would as soon be under the earth as above it."

"Who is Mr. William?"

"Their son."

"Their son?" repeated Hester. "I fancied Miss Elliot was an only child."

"Indeed I don't know what they would do if they had only her," replied Miss Graves, who had not lost her loquacity, and seemed to speak of the Elliots' family affairs very freely. "Poor thing! what comfort can they find in one afflicted as she is? Instead of the fond

pride that nature urges one to take in a child, there is rather a feeling of shame substituted, in a case like Clara Elliot's—a wish that, were it possible, we would hide such a child's very existence from the world. These I am sure are Lady Elliot's sentiments, and I fancy they would be mine. Believe me, Sir Thomas and Lady Elliot's hopes and love are confined to their son. They idolise him."

"Is he older or younger than his sister?"

"Several years older. He is nearly four-and-twenty. Ah! and he is worthy of their love. Very handsome, very fascinating, very good and affectionate; it is rare, indeed, one meets with one so deserving of praise as William Elliot."

"Does he follow his father's profession?"

"No. He is studying for the Bar; and, report says, likely to shine in it. Not that there is any necessity for William to work. His aunt, Mrs. Turnbull, left part of the property direct to him, and the rest at his parents' death; and Sir Thomas must be putting by guineas by the thousand. But William is as industrious and anxious to succeed as if he had not a shilling. If I had a son, or brother, like William Elliot, my pride in him would have no limit."

Just then Mary Goring came into the room, and began whispering in her aunt's ear; something about Miss Singleton (who was the head teacher) and bread-and-butter. Hester could not catch what she said.

"Speak up, child," she said. "We need have no secrets from Miss Graves."

Still Mary rather hesitated. "It is not for the bread-and-butter Miss Singleton requested me to inquire," she spoke at length, blushing and looking at Miss Graves. "My aunt always desires that the young ladies may have as much as ever they can eat."

"Cut thin or thick, as they please," interrupted Lucy; "but Miss Graves is no stranger to our arrangements. What is it you are saying, Mary?"

"We only feared Miss Elliot might make herself ill," resumed Mary. "She——"

"What! has she one of her eating fits upon her?" sharply interrupted Miss Graves. "Is she eating a great deal?"

"Fourteen slices since we began to count," replied Mary; "and she took from the thick plate. Miss Singleton thought it would be better to mention it before she let her take any more."

"That's Clara Elliot all over," cried Miss Graves. "These eating fits—as we call them—do come over her now and then. You must limit her at these times to what is sufficient, Miss Halliwell."

"Perhaps she will not be limited," replied Hester.

"Oh, yes, she will. You will find her extremely tractable. Control her with gentle authority, as you would a young child, and she will obey you. It is of no use to reason."

And so they found. And they got on pretty well with Miss

Elliot. The worst days were her laughing ones. She would suddenly burst into a laugh, no one knew at what, and nothing could stop her; shrill, screaming, hearty laughter, one burst upon another, and she throwing herself backwards and forwards on her seat with the exertion. Laughing is contagious, and the first time it came on the whole school caught it, and fell into the roar; some went into hysterics, and others narrowly escaped convulsions. They had never had such a scene; the teachers, even, were affected, and the Miss Halliwells quite driven out of their self-possession. In future, they led her instantly from the school-room, and let her have her laugh out away from the school girls. Another annoying thing was about the pianos. Someone sat by her whilst she practised, generally Mary Goring, to whom she had taken a great fancy; but she would seize a sly opportunity of bringing both her hands down upon the keys, with such force as to break the wires—thump, thump, thump, as one uses a hammer, laughing in delight the whole time. The strength of her hands was astonishing, and they had two pianos damaged in one day. Lucy Halliwell and the teachers declared she used to be worse at the full and change of the moon, but Hester did not see much difference. There was one thing in her favour—that she was perfectly truthful, always telling the straightforward truth fearlessly. No matter whether a fact told against her or for her, out it came without any softening down. It would seem that the dread of displeasure which causes other children to equivocate when endeavouring to conceal a fault was a feeling unknown to Clara Elliot.

On the third day of her residence at Halliwell House, Hester was seated in the drawing-room while Mary Goring took her lesson from the harp-master, when one of the maids announced Mr. William Elliot, and there entered one of the very handsomest young men Hester had ever seen. She did not admire men who are generally called handsome: big, showy, black-curled, prominent-featured, high complexioned, with loud voices, confident manners, and long moustachios. Mr. William Elliot was none of that: tall, he certainly was, and elegant, with features of great beauty, pale and quiet, a sweet look in his hazel eyes, and a pleasant voice and manner that attracted you, whether you would or not. Hester did not know what there was in him to win her heart, but as he held out his hand to her and asked after his sister, it went over to him there and then. Mary continued her playing without notice, for it was the rule of the house that lessons were never interrupted for the entrance of visitors. She had, however, nearly finished.

Clara Elliot came in, giggling and jumping, pulled her brother's face down to kiss, and then flapped herself on the sofa, and began one of those senseless fits of laughing. The harp-master left just then, and Hester was glad of it. Young Mr. Elliot, with a flush on his face, wound his arm about her waist.

"Clara! Clara!" he said, in kind but authoritative tones. "I want to talk to you. Do not laugh just now. Come and look at my new horse."

Her silly laugh subsided instantly. It was evident that her brother had a hold on her affections or her poor mind, and she suffered him to take her to the window. A groom, well mounted, was leading his young master's horse before the house.

"Oh, he is superb!" cried Clara, jumping again as soon as she saw the horse. "When did you buy him, William?"

"Only yesterday."

"Come and look," she uttered, darting across the room, and pulling forward Mary Goring, who was putting the music straight preparatory to leaving the drawing-room; "it's my brother's new horse. Do you know who she is?" she added, as soon as they reached the window—"she is my new sister. Her name's Mary."

He bowed slightly at this unceremonious introduction. Mary would have released herself, but the girl clasped her tightly with her strong hands.

A foolish fancy came over Hester, and perhaps it is foolish to relate it, but that can do neither harm nor good now. As they stood there side by side, William Elliot and Mary Goring, their profiles were turned towards Hester, and she was struck with a singular likeness between the two—the same beautiful cast of features, the drooping eyelid, the arched nostril, and the same sweet look in the mouth. It struck a chill on her heart. She hardly knew whether it was presentiment or whether it was the breeze from the door, but the likeness and the chill were both there. She drove it away and forgot it: though she had too good cause to remember it afterwards: and she unwound Miss Elliot's arms and dismissed Mary.

"I hope Lady Elliot's cold is better," Hester said to her visitor.

"Thank you, yes. She talks of driving down to-morrow. I am glad you are happy, Clara," continued Mr. William Elliot, fondly stroking his sister's hair. "Do you think," he said in a low tone to Hester, as Clara flew off to another part of the room on some flighty errand, "that the change here promises to be of service to her?"

Hester said she could not give an opinion: Clara had been with them too short a time; and presently Mr. Elliot took leave.

As he left the room, Hester turned to ring the bell, and in that moment Clara flung the window wide open, and stretched herself dangerously out of it. Hester's heart was in her mouth—as the saying goes—and she sprang towards Clara, and managed to take the bell-pull with her.

"My dear," she said, "you must not lean out in this way; you might fall and kill yourself. Besides, it is too cold for the window to be opened to-day. Jack Frost is in the roads."

"I like Jack Frost," she answered. "And I never fall out of the window. I hold on."

Hester closed the window, taking Clara's hand in hers, and again came that silly laugh. It was at sight of her brother, who was going out at the gate. He looked up with those handsome eyes of his, and kissed his hand to her. The groom cantered up, and Mr. William Elliot prepared to mount.

She was like a young cat ! Before Hester well knew she had drawn away her hand, before she knew she had left her side, she had flown downstairs and was out in the road, dancing round her brother's horse. The horse began dancing too. Clara only clapped her hands and danced the faster.

Susan rushed out to the gate, and Hester rushed down the stairs, and the bell-pull after her, which had somehow hooked itself on to the pocket-hole of her dress. But Mr. William Elliot was off his steed, quietly, but quick as a flash of lightning, had thrown the bridle to the groom, and had his arm round Clara, leading her in again. Hester met them at the hall-door.

"You must not think me wanting in care," she panted to him, the fright having run away with her breath: "I was not prepared for her sudden movements. I shall be so in future."

"Her movements sometimes are sudden," he replied, "but she never comes to harm. There is a providence over her, Miss Halliwell, as there is over a child."

The next day, a very fine one, though cold, Miss Graves came down in the carriage. Lady Elliot's cold was worse, so she had sent her instead to take Clara for an airing. Clara pouted, and would not go. Miss Graves was at a nonplus.

"Lady Elliot will blame me, and say it was my fault," she said. "She made a point of her going out this bright day. Clara, dear, we shall see such fine things as we go along ; we shall see Punch and Judy. It is in full work, fife and drum and all, lower down the road."

Punch and Judy was a sight that poor Clara was wild after ; there was nothing she enjoyed so much in life. Miss Graves really had passed the show on her way. This was a great temptation to Clara, and she seemed irresolute, but finally shook her head ; she wanted to stay with Mary Goring. Miss Graves then suggested that Mary should accompany them and see Punch too, and Clara eagerly seized at it.

"So you had a visit from William Elliot yesterday," observed Miss Graves, when they were gone to get ready. "What young lady was it he saw here ?"

"He only saw his sister," Hester replied, forgetting as she spoke the temporary stay of Mary in the drawing-room. "And two sad frights she gave me."

"Yes, he did," returned Miss Graves. "One of the young ladies, he told me."

"Oh, true, I remember now. It was my niece. Miss Goring."

"Then he is surely smitten with her," was the rejoinder of Miss Graves. "He kept talking about her to me last night, and said she was the sweetest girl he ever saw."

"Ah, young men are apt to say that of all the pretty girls they meet," was Hester's answer; but somehow she thought of that ugly chill again.

CHAPTER XXX.

CLARA'S ESCAPE.

EASTER approached, and Clara Elliot went home on the Wednesday in Passion Week to spend some days. On the Thursday she got Mary Goring into her head, and so teased her mother to send for her that Lady Elliot grew quite cross. In most cases Clara was as easily swayed as a child, but when she did get hold of a fixed idea and turn obstinate over it, there was no moving her. At the dinner-table she refused to eat. "I don't want any dinner," she sullenly remarked; "I want Mary Goring."

"Who in the world's Mary Goring?" inquired Sir Thomas.

"Oh, one of her schoolfellows," replied Lady Elliot. "She has been dinning the name into me all day."

"Nonsense," responded Sir Thomas. "You are putting on more childishness than you need, Clara. Eat your dinner."

"She is not nonsense," retorted Clara. "She is better than you are here. William knows it."

A flush, quite uncalled for, rose to Mr. William Elliot's face. "Clara has talked to me about some young lady whom she seems to have taken a fancy to," he explained. "I suppose it is the same."

"You saw her!" burst forth Clara; "you have seen her twice. You know you did."

"Have I?" answered Mr. William.

Lady Elliot interposed, and, to pacify Clara, promised that she should fetch Mary Goring on the morrow. But the morrow was Good Friday. They went to church. After service some visitors came in, and the day passed without fetching Mary Goring, neither had they seen Clara Elliot so obstinately sullen. Alas! the next morning Clara was missing. The house was searched, but she was nowhere to be found. They supposed she must have risen early, dressed herself, and then must have gone out, unseen by Miss Graves and the servants. Her bonnet, velvet mantle, and suite of furs were gone. A strange commotion the house was in. Never had Clara Elliot attempted such an escapade before. Lady Elliot was nearly out of her senses.

"She must have gone after that young girl she was worrying over," cried Sir Thomas, when informed of the disaster. "Mary—what was it? Her schoolfellow."

Nothing more likely. And Mr. William Elliot, the most active of the party, flew downstairs and into a cab.

The Miss Halliwells were seated at breakfast in the dining-room when one of the servants entered and said that Mr. William Elliot had called and wished to see her mistress.

"Mr. William Elliot at this hour!" repeated Hester, rising from her chair. "Can anything unpleasant have happened?"

"You'll never go to him that figure, aunt!" cried Mary Goring in alarm.

Hester considered, and believed that she did look singular. For on this Saturday morning, as many of the pupils had gone home, the maids were going to turn out part of the house, and Hester was going to help them. She had put on a large old-fashioned muslin cap, with a spreading border, to save her head from dust, and a short buff cotton bed-gown—if the modern reader knows what that old-fashioned article means.

"He will think Aunt Hester's showing out in her night-cap and night-dress," said Master Alfred Goring, who had gone to them for a three days' holiday. Matthew, the eldest son, had received an appointment in India, and had not long sailed.

"The gentleman is waiting outside," interposed Ann. "He would not go upstairs."

"Dear me! Outside! Never mind my dress, children. I beg your pardon for keeping you there," said Hester, as he entered. "I had no conception that you had not gone into the drawing-room. The truth is, I was a little averse to appearing before you in this attire, but I am going to be busy with the maids. My nephew suggested that you might think it my night-dress, but I can assure you it is not, though I beg you to excuse it."

"It is I who need excuse for disturbing you at this hour," he answered with a smile, running his eyes over her shoulders and head. And then he told his errand. But they had seen nothing of Miss Elliot, and he hurried away to prosecute the search.

About middle day Lady Elliot arrived, nearly frantic. "A girl like Clara, who wants proper sense to take care of herself!" she uttered. "Suppose she falls into bad hands! Oh, Miss Halliwell, this horrible suspense will kill me."

They could give little consolation to Lady Elliot, and she soon left. In her state of mind she could not remain long in one place. Halliwell House was like a fair that day, and the cleaning got on very badly. Hester soon found she had to leave it to the servants, change her costume, and have a fire lighted in the drawing-room. Mr. Elliot coming, as has been mentioned, in the morning; Alfred running in and out, looking for her up and down the road, and calling in at the police station; then Miss Graves coming; then Lady Elliot; then another flying visit from Mr. William; and in the after

noon they were honoured by a visit from Sir Thomas. The family that day passed their time running between their own house and Hester's, so certain did they make of the latter's being the point of Clara's journey. Sir Thomas was handsome still, but his manners had grown reserved and his speech chary; widely different from what had been the impudent and attractive Tom Elliot.

"You perceive, madam," he observed to Hester, "we can only arrive at the conclusion that my daughter must have left home to come in search of Miss—Miss—excuse me, I forget the name."

"Miss Goring."

"Miss Goring. I beg your pardon. May I be permitted to see Miss Goring? Though possibly she may not be able to throw any light on my daughter's movements."

What light was Mary likely to throw? thought Hester. However, there could be no objection to Sir Thomas Elliot's seeing her if he wished. So Mary was called.

An expression of surprise arose to Sir Thomas's face when she answered the summons. He had probably only looked to behold a silly schoolgirl, and in walked Mary, with her lady-like manners, her handsome half-mourning dress, and her winning beauty. His manner to Hester had been a little patronising—or she fancied so, but he rose up to Miss Goring the finished gentleman.

"My daughter speaks of you as her friend," he said; "she was doubtless coming in search of you; can you offer any suggestion as to where she may have strayed?"

"No," answered Mary. "Unless," she hesitated, while a damask colour flew to her cheek, for it was not pleasant to speak to a father of his daughter's delinquencies—"unless she should have met the show she is so fond of, and have followed it."

"You allude to Punch. But I think it was too early for the ridiculous exhibition to be abroad," replied Sir Thomas, who was aware of his daughter's predilection for the popular amusement.

"Have you suggested it to the police who are in search?" asked Hester. "If she did happen to see it, she would be certain to stray away in its wake."

"No," he said; "it did not occur to me. But I will lose no time in doing so now. I really thank you very much, madam, for the thought." So Sir Thomas Elliot bowed himself out, and they saw him get into his brougham.

The next arrival was Miss Graves again, just as they were going to tea, which Hester then caused to be carried into the drawing-room. Lady Elliot had sent her.

"This is really dreadful," she exclaimed, taking the cup Hester handed her; "Lady Elliot is quite beside herself with excitement, picturing all sorts of shocking things happening to the child. And she says it's my fault, that I ought to have looked better after her. I am quite exhausted."

"I know what I should do," said Lucy. "I should set the bellman to work."

"There is no bellman in London," laughed Master Alfred—the affair was fun to him. "I should engage all the Punch and Judies going, and set 'em up at the street corners. She'd be sure to appear before one of them."

"I do not fear her coming back safe," cried Miss Graves. "Who would harm a poor half-witted child like Clara Elliot?"

Lucy Halliwell looked grave. "How are they to know she is half-witted? And we do hear frightful stories of the wickedness of London."

"Which are all true," eagerly interrupted Alfred. "If they can catch hold of an unprotected female, they cut off her hair and draw her teeth, and the fashionable barbers and dentists give them no end of money for the spoil."

"Be quiet, Alfred."

"It's true, Aunt Lucy. If you don't believe me, you just go into one of the thieves' streets some day, and see how they'd serve you. My! if Miss Elliot has strayed there! won't she come back with a bald head and empty mouth!"

All this was, of course, nothing but nonsense on Alfred's part. He little thought—but it will be better to go on regularly. They were still at tea when Mr. William Elliot came in again; so pale and fagged that Hester was grieved to see him, and said so.

"I own I am disheartened," he replied. "If Clara is not found before night, I tremble for the consequences to my mother. And where to search, or what to do, more than we are already doing, I do not know."

"I say, here's a visit," exclaimed Alfred, who was then at the window. "Does Miss Elliot wear a white petticoat?"

"What do you mean?" Hester sharply said. For she did not like to hear him joking about it in the presence of Mr. Elliot.

"I am not joking, Aunt Hester," was the boy's answer. "It's a visit at your gate. A carriage without sides, laden with human live-stock, and drawn by a Jerusalem pony. What will you bet one of them is not Miss Elliot?"

They all flocked to the window. "Good Heavens above!" exclaimed Miss Graves. It *was* Miss Elliot. But in such a trim! They will never forget the sight.

The vehicle was drawn up before the gate. One of those wide boards on wheels, where you may have seen vegetables and shell-fish hawked for sale. Flat upon it sat a man, who drove the donkey, a woman holding a child, and between them a female figure in a broken straw bonnet, a ragged cotton shawl of no colour but dirt, and a white petticoat. The figure was Clara Elliot; when she came upstairs they recognised her, not before, and William Elliot's lips turned as white as ashes.

What an object the unfortunate girl presented. She was not precisely *en chemise* (as the French governess at Halliwell House was wont reproachfully to cast at the little girls when she would pounce into their chamber at night, and catch them at puss-in-the-corner) but she was not far removed from it. No velvet bonnet and mantle, no furs, no silk dress, and no gloves. No boots, even. Nothing but the disgraceful bonnet and shawl, over the white petticoat, her own stockings and a pair of slipshod slippers, which could have no parallel, unless it was in the Crimea, as mentioned by Ensign Pepper. Clara seemed to enjoy the affair amazingly, and threw herself on a chair with bursts of laughter, hugging the shawl round her. Her hair and teeth were safe.

"Does this here young lady belong to here?" began the man, a tall fellow, all skin and bone, with a deformed foot.

They all answered in a breath that the young lady did belong to them, but Mr. Elliot's voice rose highest, demanding to know where she had been detained, and what brought her home in that state.

"I was away on my rounds, gentlefolks," returned the man, "and knowed nothing on it till I come home this a'ternoon, and found the young miss along of my missis. They can tell you about it better nor I can."

The man pushed his wife forward as he concluded. She had mild blue eyes and a hectic colour. And now that the first shock of their appearance was wearing off, Hester began to like the people. Rough and dark as the man was, common and low as they were in station, she felt sure they were honest and kindly.

"We keep a bit of a shed for coal, ma'am, near to Covent Garden, and for greens and things that my husband can't sell on his rounds," the woman began, addressing herself to Hester, whom she probably took for Clara's mother: "and this morning, about eleven o'clock, as I was coming in from delivering a quarter-of-a-hundred of coals to a customer, somebody lays hold on me and asks if that was the way to Halliwell House, —— Road. So I said, no, it wasn't, nor anywhere near it; and then I noticed what a odd-looking young person it was, and she burst out laughing (perhaps because she saw me a-staring at her), and up and told me she had been robbed of her clothes. Well, I did not pay no attention to her, for we have all sorts of girls in our part, saving your presence, ladies, but she followed me into our shed, and began playing with my children, and asked me to get a cab and take her home. I asked her if she'd got some money, and she said no, they had taken her purse, but her friends would pay. So after that I put some questions to her, and began to believe her tale, especially as I saw that her underclothes, which they had not touched, was fine, like a lady's."

"Who took your clothes from you, Clara?" interposed Mr. William, in the kind but authoritative tone he sometimes used towards her.

"I was coming here to fetch Mary," she answered. "I had walked a good way, and was looking for the turning, but I could not find the right one. Then a woman asked what I wanted, and I told her, and she said she would show me, and took me along with her."

"Well? Go on, Clara," said her brother.

"She took me into a room, up some dirty stairs, where there was another woman. I was angry, and said that was not Halliwell House, and she said we were only going to have some breakfast first. She said that," added Clara, her eyes brightening up, "because I told her I had cheated mamma and all of them, and run away without any. Then she and the other woman took my own things off me, and my pocket, and put these on, and when I cried, they promised I should have them all back again when I got home, and they gave me some bread and bacon."

"What did they do after that?"

"After that, the other woman came out with me, and said she was going to bring me here, but suddenly she was gone, and I could not find her. It was a nasty, dirty street, and I did not know my way, so I asked *her*"—pointing to the woman in the room.

"It is the same tale she told to me, ma'am," resumed the woman to Hester. "There are wretches in this wicked town that do prowl about to pick up children and others who can't defend themselves and rob them of their things. So I believed as the young lady had telled the truth, and I kep' her in our back room, along of my young ones, and wouldn't let her go into the street, as she wanted, for she don't seem to be one as ought to be abroad by herself, and I give her a bit of our dinner, such as it was. And when my husband and big boy came home, I persuaded of him to bring her down here, which he didn't want to, and I come along myself, for, says I, her friends will be more satisfied like, if I goes to testify that she has been kep' safe since she come into my hands. I'm ashamed as I'd nothing to lend her to put on, in place of them dirty things," added the woman, with an increase in her hectic colour, and lowering her tone, "but this have been a hard winter with us, and I have been forced to put away all but what I stands up in."

There was genuine good feeling betrayed in the woman's speech, and William Elliot's eyelashes glistened as he turned to look out into the road. His unfortunate sister! what a display it was for him.

"It warn't as I were unfeeling, or thought of my trouble in bringing the young person down, gentlefolks," gruffly spoke up the husband, "nor it warn't as I knew the animal was done up; but there ain't a busier day throughout the year for us costermongers than Easter Saturday, and I was going out again with a fresh stock, which now I have lost the sale on. Our boy Bill, too, as we've left in charge of the shed and the young ones, can't sell as his mother can."

"You shall be no loser by what you have done, my good man," interposed Mr. Elliot, warmly.

"Well, sir, it were my missis as talked me into it, so I won't say as it weren't. 'Suppose it was our own girl, Bill, as were lost,' says she to me, 'shouldn't we be in a peck o' grief over it, and ain't this one's folks the same, and ain't it our duty to take her home without delaying of it, and let 'em see that no great harm have come to her?' So, with that, I harnessed in the donkey again, for I had took him out for a rest, and folded a sack for the young person to sit upon, and brought her down."

What more he would have said, if anything, was interrupted by Clara Elliot. She sprang to the tea-table, seized upon a slice of bread-and-butter, which was lying there on a plate, and offered it to the woman. "Take it," she said; "you gave me some of your potatoes to-day."

"Not for me, miss," was the answer; "I can do without it. If I might give it to my little boy instead"—looking at Hester—"I should be glad." She had held the boy in her arms the whole time, but with difficulty, for he seemed to be a most restless child, about two years old. "He's always up at the sight of food, ma'am, for he don't get enough of it, and children has such appetites."

William Elliot took the bread-and-butter from Clara, doubled it, and gave it himself to the child. "He shall get enough in future," he whispered to the mother, with one of his kindly looks.

The people went out; William Elliot with them; Alfred followed, and the party upstairs gathered round the window to see them drive away again. The man sat down first, helped up his wife, civilly enough, and they stuck the boy between them on Clara's sack. William Elliot stood by, writing down in his pocket-book the man's address, and Alfred Goring stood at the gate in a frenzy of delight at the scene. Almost at the same moment Lady Elliot drove up in a hired cab: her own horses were tired.

She came upstairs, and was painfully agitated when she heard the details, although thankful to receive Clara safe and sound. The girl's half-clad, ludicrous appearance, the wretched substitute for her own clothes, the description of her conveyance home, the nondescript vehicle on which she sat in state, on the coal-sack, behind the donkey, the rough costermonger and his half-starved wife, and, worst of all, the girl's utter indifference to the shame! Indifference! she *enjoyed* the remembrance of the novel ride. All this was as worm-wood to Lady Elliot.

Clara turned restive about going home and said she would stop where she was, with Mary Goring. It was thought advisable to give in to her, at any rate for a day or two: and she went dancing upstairs to have her clothes changed, the desirable articles she had been rejoicing over being immediately consigned to the dust-bin.

"Oh, William, what a disgrace!" murmured Lady Elliot to her son, as the red flush came into her pale cheeks, the light into her glistening eye; "better I had no daughter, you no sister, than to

have her thus; better that it would please God to remove her from us!"

Little less agitated was he as he bent before his mother, little less flushed his own face, but it was with pain at hearing such words from her. "Dear mother," he whispered, as he took her hands, "look not upon it in this spirit. Rather be thankful that the affliction is so much lighter than it might be—and especially thankful this day, as I am, that she is restored to us unharmed."

She strained his hands in hers, before parting with them, and gazed tenderly into his handsome face, feeling thankful for the blessing bestowed upon her in *him*. And, indeed, she had cause: for there are few sons in these degenerate days like William Elliot.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SIR THOMAS AND LADY ELLIOT.

So that warning chill, as Hester Halliwell called it, had worked itself out, and the tribulation had come. *Was* it her fault? She asked herself the question every hour of her life. Perhaps when Lady Elliot invited Mary to spend some time in her luxurious home, Hester ought to have refused. But Lady Elliot pressed for her, saying what a comfort she would be to their unfortunate daughter, and Hester was laughed at for hinting at an objection. Lucy laughed at her; Miss Graves laughed at her; Frances Goring, though she was little more than a child, laughed at her; and when they inquired her grounds, she had none to give, for not even to herself did she, or could she, define them. "They live in style, they keep gay company, servants, carriages; it will be giving Mary ideas beyond her sphere of life," were all the arguments Hester could urge; none difficult to over-rule. So Mary went for a few days at Easter, which would have been nothing, for she came back perfectly heart-whole; but she went again at Midsummer to accompany Lady Elliot and Clara to the sea-side, and then the mischief was done. What else could have been expected, thrown, as she was, into the fascinating society of William Elliot?

But who was to know that he would make one of the party? No one. In the first week of Lady Elliot's arrival at Spa (as good a name as any other for their marine residence, as it is not convenient to give the right one) she was surprised at being followed thither by her son. He had come for some sea-bathing, he said, and forthwith engaged apartments at an hotel. Nine weeks Lady Elliot remained, and the whole of that time he and Mary Goring were thrown together. Sir Thomas Elliot wrote once, a curt, decisive letter of three lines, demanding how much more time he meant to waste, and Mr William wrote back that he was studying where he was just as hard as he

could in his chambers. So he was : studying the sweet face and pure mind of Mary Goring. Had Sir Thomas suspected that, his letter might have been more decisive.

"I guessed how it was," Miss Graves said afterwards to Hester. "There were climbings up the cliffs, and ramblings on the beach after sea shells, and readings in the afternoon, and moonlight lingerings in the garden in the evening : Mr. William could not quite deceive me. I was left to take care of Clara Elliot, while he talked sentiment with Miss Goring."

"Strolling on the beach together, and talking sentiment by moonlight!" uttered Hester in dismay. "And you could see all this going on and never write to me!"

"It's the moonlight does it all," peevishly retorted Miss Graves; "sentimental strolls would come to nothing without it. The moon puts more nonsense into young heads than all the novels that ever were penned. I'll give you an example. One night they were all out in the garden, Mr. William, Clara, and Miss Goring. A long, narrow strip of ground it was at the back of the house, stretching down nearly to the sea. Tea came in, and Lady Elliot called to them from the window, but no one answered, so I had to hunt them up. I tied my handkerchief over my head, for I had a touch of the toothache, and away I went. It was an intensely hot night, with the moon as bright as silver; and I looked here, and I looked there, till I got to the end of the garden. On the bench there, fast asleep, with her head resting on the hard rock behind her, was Clara, and close by stood William Elliot, with his arm round Mary, both of them gazing at the moon. Now, I ask you, Miss Halliwell, or any other impartial person, whether such a scene could have been presented to me in broad daylight? People are reserved enough then, and take care to stand at a respectful distance. The moon is alone to blame, and I'll maintain it."

She vexed Hester uncommonly with her rubbish about the moon. As if, thought Hester, when she saw them growing fond of each other, she could not have despatched a hint of it by the post. "What could Lady Elliot have been thinking of?" she asked aloud.

"Bless you, *she* saw nothing of it," returned Miss Graves. "Her idea was that William haunted us for the sake of taking care of Clara, and she was rarely out with us herself. She makes so much of Mr. William : it would never enter her imagination that he could fall in love with anything less than a lord's daughter. She would see no more danger in Mary Goring than in me. But there's no great harm done, Miss Halliwell. When I was Mary Goring's age I had lots of attachments, one after the other, and they never came to anything. A dozen at least."

Hester thought it very stupid, comparing herself with Mary Goring. Not that she wished to underrate Miss Graves, who was estimable in her way, but she and Mary were so differently constituted.

Miss Graves full of practical sobriety, without a grain of romance in her composition, all head; while Mary was made up of imaginative sentiment and refined feeling, all heart. The one *would* be likely to have a dozen "attachments" and forget them as soon as they were over; but the other, if she once loved, would retain the traces for all her future life. It was of no use, however, saying so to Miss Graves, she would not have understood it, and Hester was too vexed to argue. Besides, it would not undo what had been done.

Hester had seen it as soon as Mary returned from Spa. There was a change about the girl; a serene look of inward happiness, an absence of mind to what was going on around her, a giving way to dreamy listlessness of thought. And when, in the course of conversation, it came out that William Elliot had made one of the party at Spa, her aunt's surprised exclamation caused the flush in Mary's cheeks to deepen into glowing, conscious crimson. In one of her letters Mary had mentioned William's name, but Hester never supposed he was there for more than a day or two—had taken a run down to see his mother and sister. That suspicious crimson convinced her at once. She wished it anywhere but in Mary's face; and when Miss Graves went to Halliwell House a few days subsequently to spend an evening, Hester spoke to her. Hence the above conversation.

"You need not annoy yourselves over it," persisted Miss Graves, who was anxious to excuse herself. "If they did fall in love with each other—which I daresay they did, and I won't tell any story about it—they will soon forget it, now they don't meet. If you keep her out of sight when Mr. William calls here, he will soon cease coming, and the affair will die a natural death."

"Of course Mary will not be permitted to see him," rejoined Hester, warmly: "but as to the affair dying out, that's another thing."

The crosses that good resolutions meet with: the ruses young people are up to, unsuspected by old ones! While Hester and Miss Graves were cleverly laying down plans for the separation of the two parties in question, they were actually together in the dining-room below. Upon Hester's descending to that apartment some time afterwards, there she came upon them. They were standing at the open window, enjoying each other's society in the dangerous twilight hour of that summer's night; in the sweet scent of the closing flowers; in the calm rays of the early stars—all dangerous together for two young hearts. The saying of "knocking one down with a feather" could not precisely apply to Hester, for you might have knocked her down with half a one.

"Well, I'm sure!" uttered Hester, not in her usual tone of polite courtesy. "I did not know *you* were here, sir. Have you been here long?"

"Not long," replied William Elliot, advancing to shake hands.

Not long! It came into Hester's mind as she spoke that she had heard the knock of a visitor a full hour before.

She had not seen him for three months, and his good looks, his winning manners, struck upon her more forcibly than ever. Not so pleasantly as they used to do, for the annoying reflection suggested itself—If they won over to him her old heart, what must they have done by Mary's? Hester took her resolution: it was to speak openly to him: and she sent Mary upstairs to Lucy and Miss Graves.

"Mr. Elliot," she began in heat, "was this well done?"

He looked fearlessly at her, with his truthful eye and open countenance. "Is what well done?" he rejoined.

"I am deeply grieved at having suffered my niece to accompany your mother to the sea-side," continued Hester. "Had I known you were to be of the party, she should certainly not have gone."

"Why not, Miss Halliwell?"

"Why not! I hear of ramblings on the sands, and moonlight interviews in the garden—you with Mary Goring. Was this well done, sir?"

"It was not ill done," was his reply.

"Mr. Elliot," Hester went on, "I am a plain-speaking old body, but I have had some experience in life, and I find that plain-speaking answers best in the end. You must be aware that such conduct as you have pursued cannot well fail to gain the affections of an inexperienced girl: and my belief is that you have been wilfully setting yourself out to win those of Miss Goring."

"I will not deny it: I have tried to win them. Because, dear Miss Halliwell," he added, speaking with emotion, "because she first gained mine. I love Miss Goring truly, fervently, with a love that will end but with my life. From the first day I saw her here, when poor Clara said she had found a new sister—you may remember it—she never ceased to haunt me; her face, and its sweet expression, her manners, her gentle voice, were in my mind continually, and I knew they could only belong to a good, pure, and refined nature. It did not take long companionship, when we were thrown together, to perfect that love; and, that done, I did set myself out, as you observe, to win hers, in exchange. I trust I have succeeded."

Had Hester raced up to the top of the monument, where she had never yet ventured, the run could not more effectually have taken away her breath than did this bold avowal, which, to her ears, sounded as much like rhapsody as reason. "And what, in the name of wonder, do you promise yourself by all this, sir?" she asked, when her amazement could find speech. "What end?"

"There is but one end that such an avowal could have in view, Miss Halliwell," he replied. "The end, the hope that Miss Goring will become my wife."

"Well, you will excuse me, Mr. Elliot," said Hester, after a long stare at him, "but I fear you must be crazed."

He burst into laughter. "Why do you fear that?"

"There is no more probability of your marrying Mary Goring than

there is of your marrying that chair, sir. So the best thing you can do is to get her out of your head as speedily as you can."

He did not speak for some moments, and the colour mounted to his brow. "What is your objection to me, Miss Halliwell?"

"I suppose you are playing on my simplicity to ask what my objection is," returned Hester. "It is your family that the objection will come from, not mine. The son of the rich and great Sir Thomas Elliot will never be suffered to wed simple Mary Goring."

"Miss Goring is of gentle blood," he remonstrated.

"I trust she is," said Hester, drawing herself up; "though we, the sisters of her mother, are obliged to keep a school for our living. But your friends will look at position as well as gentle blood. May I ask if Sir Thomas and Lady Elliot know of this?"

"Not yet."

"As I thought, Mr. Elliot. Your romance with my niece must end this night."

"It will not, indeed, Miss Halliwell."

"Sir, it shall. And I must observe that you have acted a cruel part. A young lady's affections are not to be played with like a football. However, you have seen her for the last time."

"Allow me to see her once more," he rejoined.

"Not if I know it, sir."

"But for one instant, in your presence," he pleaded. "Surely that can do no harm, if we are to part."

Something came into Hester's brain just then about George Archer—a vision of her last interview with him in Lord Seaford's park. "Why should she deny these two a final adieu?" she asked herself. So she relented, and called Mary down—and Hester reproached herself afterwards with being exceedingly soft for her pains.

Mary shrank to Hester's side when she came in, but William Elliot drew her away. "I have been avowing to your aunt how matters stand," he said. "She would persuade me to relinquish you: she thinks such love as ours can be thrown off at will. So I requested your presence here, Mary, that we might assure her our engagement is of a different nature, that we are bound to each other by ties irrevocable in the spirit as they shall hereafter be made so in reality."

So that was all Hester got for calling Mary. She had paled, and blushed, and faltered, and now she began to cry and tremble, and William Elliot leaned over her and reassured her with words of the deepest tenderness. Hester saw nothing but perplexity before them, and not one wink of sleep did she get that night.

One day the renowned physician, Sir Thomas Elliot, was not himself. In lieu of the stately imperturbability which characterised the distinguished West-end practitioner, his manners betrayed a nervousness, an absence of mind, never before witnessed in him. To one lady patient, who consulted him for dyspepsia, he ordered cod-liver-

oil and port-wine; to another, far gone in a consumption, he prescribed leeches, and to live upon barley-water. He had a large influx of patients that day, and an unusual number of calls to make from home. Not until the dinner-hour did he find his time his own.

He went straight to his wife's room, and sat down upon a low ottoman which stood in its centre. Lady Elliot glanced round at him, somewhat surprised, for it was not often her liege knight favoured her with his presence there in the day. She continued dressing without comment. Sir Thomas and Lady Elliot rarely wasted superfluous words one upon the other.

"Can't you finish for yourself and send her away?" cried Sir Thomas, indicating the attendant by a movement of the head.

More surprised still, but not curious (for Lady Elliot, young and handsome as she was yet, really gave one the idea of possessing no interest in what pertained to this present life—or in the one to follow it, for the matter of that), she dismissed the maid, but did not withdraw herself or her eyes from the glass, as she continued her toilette.

"I did not think, Louisa, you could have been such a fool," was the complimentary opening of Sir Thomas Elliot, in low tones of intense indignation.

Lady Elliot looked at him—as well she might—and a flush rose to her face. She paused, however, before she spoke, coldly and resentfully.

"I proved myself that, years ago."

Sir Thomas knew well to what she alluded: to her own hasty and unsanctioned union with himself: and a peevish "tush" broke from his lips.

"You have proved yourself a greater one now, Louisa, and you must pardon my plainness in saying so. If you and I rushed into a headlong marriage it ought to have been the more reason for your not leading William into one."

"William!" echoed Lady Elliot, in a startled voice. It was, perhaps, the only subject that could arouse her. She idolised her son.

"You have got into this habit of taking your own course, without consulting or referring to me; going here, going there—doing this, doing that," proceeded Sir Thomas. "When you went to Spa for an eternal number of weeks, had you informed me that it was your intention to have William and Miss Goring there also, and make them companions to each other, I should have put a stop to it. Anyone but you might have seen the result."

"Result?" faltered Lady Elliot, with a sickening foreshadowing of what was coming.

"Of course," angrily repeated Sir Thomas. "When a young fellow like William is thrown for weeks into the society of a girl, lovely and fascinating as—as—the deuce"—Sir Thomas at the

moment could not think of any more appropriate simile—"only one result can be looked for. And it has turned up in his case."

"You mean ——"

"That he is over head and ears in love with her ; and has been to me this morning to ask my sanction to their marriage. I wish you joy of your daughter-in-law, Lady Elliot."

Lady Elliot scarcely suppressed a scream. "It is impossible, it is impossible," she reiterated in agitation. "I never thought of this."

"Then you must have lived at Spa with your eyes shut. But I can hardly believe you. To think that you and Eliza Graves could be moping and meandering all those weeks and not see what was going on under your very noses ! Women are the greatest ——"

What, Sir Thomas did not say, for he dropped his voice before bringing the sentence to a conclusion. "I thought William was at Spa an unaccountable time, and wrote him word so," he continued, "but I never imagined you had that Miss Goring there."

"You must have known it," returned Lady Elliot.

"How should I ? I saw she was staying here the day or two before you went, but I thought—if I thought at all about it—that, as a matter of course, she returned home. I say you are always acting for yourself, Lady Elliot, without reference to my feelings—if I have any, which, perhaps, you don't believe. When, the morning of the day fixed for your departure, I was summoned in haste out of town, you might have delayed it until the following one. Most wives would. But no, not you ! I came back at night, and found you gone. How was I to know that you took Miss Goring with you ?"

"It is too preposterous ever really to come to anything," observed Lady Elliot, anxious to find comfort in the opinion. "William, with his personal beauty, his talents, and his prospects, might marry into a duke's family if he chose."

"Exactly. But he chooses to marry into that of a schoolmistress."

"He must not 'choose,'" persisted Lady Elliot, growing excited ; "he must be brought to reason."

"Brought to what ?" asked the knight.

"Reason."

"I don't know," was the significant reply. "'Reason' did not avail in a similar case with you or with me. William may prove a chip of the old block."

"It never can be permitted," said Lady Elliot vehemently. "Marry Mary Goring ! It would be disgracing him for life. William would never prove so ungrateful."

"Leaving your ladyship the agreeable reflection that you were the chief bringer-about of the disgrace. Looking at the affair dispassionately, I do not see how it is to be prevented. William possesses money, independently of us. Enough to live upon."

"Enough to starve upon," scornfully interrupted Lady Elliot.

"Twice, nearly thrice, as much as we enjoyed for many years of

our early lives," rejoined Sir Thomas in a subdued voice. "And to them, who are just now spoony with fantastic visions, 'Love in a cottage' may wear the appearance of love in a paradise."

"Can nothing be done—can *nothing* stop it?" reiterated Lady Elliot.

"One thing may. I should have put it in force this morning, but that I certainly thought you must be a party to this scheme, after what William let out of the goings-on at Spa."

"And that thing?" she eagerly asked.

"To forbid it, on pain of my curse. As I believe our parents very nearly did by us. I do not think William would brave it."

Lady Elliot pressed her hands over her eyes, as if she would shut out recollection of the years which had followed her rebellious marriage. The retrospect was one of dire anguish; far worse, in all probability, than had been the reality. Her husband turned to leave the room. She sprang after him, and drew him back.

"Oh, Thomas! anything but that. Never curse our boy, whatever betide. Think of the misery our disobedience entailed on us. Do not force *him* into it."

"Then you will let him marry the girl?"

"Yes. If the only alternative must be our fate over again for him."

"He comes to-night for the answer," continued Sir Thomas, standing with the door in his hand. "What is it to be? Consent? I leave the decision to you, for I will not, in this matter, subject myself to after-reproaches."

"Consent," she replied. But Lady Elliot wrung her hands in anger as she said it. She had anticipated so much more brilliant an alliance for her son.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CONSULTATION.

So sunshine came into Halliwell House, for William Elliot went there and laid his proposals for Mary in due form before the Miss Halliwells. They could not believe their own ears. He frankly stated that Sir Thomas and Lady Elliot were not cordially inclined to the match, for they had looked to his choosing rank and wealth; but they had not withheld their consent, and he was certain Mary would soon win her way to their entire love. Perhaps this was as much as Mary Goring could have hoped for; indeed more, for in point of worldly greatness William Elliot *was* above her. Hester suggested that they should not marry till the "entire love" of Sir Thomas and his wife had been gained, but Mr. Elliot laughed at her, and of course Mary thought with him. They were both in a maze of enchantment, and common-sense, as Hester understood the word, was out of the

question. Preparations were begun for the marriage, and for a few weeks the house was the pleasantest of the pleasant.

"I told you it would turn out well," triumphantly exclaimed Miss Graves one day when she came down to see Clara Elliot.

"But you told us it would turn out well by coming to nothing," laughed Lucy. "You have been away a whole month, Miss Graves; where have you been? Clara said to Birmingham, but the information she picks up is not always to be depended on, and William did not seem to know."

"I went to Birmingham first, then to Cheltenham, and then back to Birmingham again. You will never guess what for, unless you have heard. Lady Elliot knew."

"We have heard nothing. Lady Elliot does not come here; when she wants to see Clara she sends for her."

"That's to show her pique at William's choice," cried Miss Graves. "I went away for my sister's wedding."

"Your sister: Mrs. Archer?"

"Yes. It is an excellent thing for her. She was lady-housekeeper, you know, at old Hazzelrigg, the button maker's; and one morning, quite unexpectedly, he asked her to marry him. She did not know whether to say yes or no, and she sent for me down to Birmingham. I found he was a martyr to illness, and wanted a wife to nurse him. 'Oh, marry him,' said I to her; 'he's only a poor old cripple, without much use in his legs; but you'll get a good home, and be mistress of it instead of manager.' So she told him she would, and we two went to Cheltenham and took lodgings there, for she didn't care exactly to have the wedding in Birmingham, in the face of all his married daughters and their families. They went to the house, I believe, and gave it him well, when they found what he was going to do, but he would not give in to them, and at the proper time he had an invalid carriage and was brought to Cheltenham, and they were married. Afterwards he told her how his daughters had gone on at him, and she said if she had known that she would not have had him. We returned to Birmingham at once, and I stayed a few days with them before coming back. That's the history; and instead of being Mrs. Archer she's Mrs. Hazzelrigg."

"I wish her joy," said Lucy, heartily. Hester was thinking of her former husband.

"Joy!" echoed Miss Graves, "that's an empty compliment in her case. But he is said to be worth a hundred thousand pounds. It is, however, chiefly settled on his family, and my sister would not wish it otherwise. But now, about your wedding here. Lady Elliot will not speak of it, and I could get at nothing. It is to be pretty soon, I find. Where are they to live?"

"Mr. Elliot has taken a pretty house at Regent's Park," said Hester.

"Bad locality," cried Miss Graves. "Always damp. What sort of style do they mean to set up in?"

"A sufficiently sumptuous one, I call it," answered Hester; "though he thinks it over moderate. I advised them to begin in a small way, more in accordance with his own than his father's income, and he listened to me. Two maids and a man they will keep; no carriage; only William's horse."

"He will be rich when Sir Thomas dies," remarked Miss Graves.

"But he and Lady Elliot may live many years."

"I suppose Mary is busy getting her things ready."

"Busy all day long," said Lucy. "Except when William is here: and that's every evening. The half-past five omnibus is sure to bring him."

"Half-past five!" echoed Miss Graves. "What time does he dine, then?"

"In the middle of the day, I believe. He has discovered that dining early is good for his constitution, and never feels well, he says, without an early tea. So that he takes with us. We have it up here in the drawing-room every evening, visitor fashion."

"That's his depth," said Miss Graves. "Good for his constitution! Does Mary see through it?"

"We do," laughed Lucy. "Sometimes he gets Hester to give Mary a lesson in housekeeping, and he sits listening to it with the most serious face imaginable; but you should catch a glimpse of his handsome eye, dancing with merriment. About legs of mutton and apple tarts, he will say, and that sends Frances Goring off into fits of laughter, almost as bad as poor Clara Elliot's. But I must say, in one respect Hester is cruel to him."

"How?"

"She is so tantalising. She professes to allow them courting interviews—makes a boast of it, indeed—but before they have had time to say a word to each other, in she goes, and breaks it up. Very exasperating it must be to Mr. William."

"I limit their interviews to three minutes," explained Hester, "and look at my watch that they may not exceed it. My dear mother brought me up in these punctilious manners, and I approve of them."

"What a shame!" cried Miss Graves. "I should take her out for a walk, were I William Elliot, and talk to her then."

"He did try once," said Lucy. "He asked Hester to let Mary go, but she offered herself instead, and he has never asked since. I do think it is too bad, but Hester is the manager, so I can't interfere."

"I think it's a great deal too bad," repeated Miss Graves. "Why, they get no courting at all. It is a contrast to Spa, I can tell you."

"They had too much of it," said Hester. "Mary is occasionally invited, with Clara, to spend the day at Lady Elliot's, and——"

"Is she cordial with Mary again," interrupted Miss Graves.

"She has had her there lately. I expect at first she made a merit of necessity, but she grows more cordial with every visit, and is almost

as fond of her as she used to be before she knew of William's preference."

"That is pleasant," said Miss Graves. "What were you going to say?"

"Why—the carriage brings them home at night," remarked Hester, "Mary and Clara, escorted by Mr. William; and a nice time those two must have of it, for Clara is safe to go to sleep the instant they get in, and never wake till they get out. Plenty of time for talking secrets then, I hope."

"That's capital!" exclaimed Miss Graves, clapping her hands. "It makes up for your barbarity, Miss Halliwell."

"You may call it capital," returned Hester, "but it is against my old-fashioned notions of propriety. I hinted so to Mr. William. How he laughed! I laughed too, and could not help it, when he told me I was a good old dragon of a guardian. Then he changed to seriousness, as he took my hand in his, that sweet, earnest expression rising to his face, and whispered that I could not wish to protect Mary more faithfully than he would do, for that she was dearer to him than ever she was to me. Altogether, things go on very nicely," concluded Hester, "and we are very happy."

They were happy. But an end came to it: as it comes for the most part to all things that are joyful and bright in life. And then Hester asked herself how she could ever have been deluded into the belief that the son of Sir Thomas and Lady Elliot would really espouse Mary Goring.

A telegraphic summons came early one morning to the popular physician, Sir Thomas Elliot. He was wanted in all haste at Middlebury. Sir Thomas hastened to the Paddington station, caught the express train, and was with his patient, a lady, in the afternoon. Her medical attendant was Dr. Ashe; and a Mr. Warburton was also called in. When in conversation, the discourse of the medical men led to matters foreign to their patient—no very rare occurrence in medical consultations.

"I should like to know what her previous constitution has been," remarked Sir Thomas to Dr. Ashe, speaking in reference to the patient. "I presume you have been her usual medical attendant."

"No, I have not," replied Dr. Ashe—who was only called "Dr." according to the Middlebury fashion; "this is the first time I have attended her. Dr. Goring used to be the family attendant. But she must have enjoyed pretty good health, for he has been dead—let me see—more than two years, and no one has been called in to her since."

Dr. Goring! Sir Thomas Elliot pricked up his ears, and a flash of intelligence darted into his mind. She, who was soon to be his son's wife, was a native of Middlebury, and the daughter of a medical man. This Dr. Goring, then, must have been her father. He would ask a few particulars.

"What sort of a man was Dr. Goring?" he suddenly said. "Respectable? Popular?"

"Very much so," was the reply of Dr. Ashe.

"Until that nasty business occurred about his wife," broke in Mr. Warburton. "He lost both respect and popularity then."

"What business was that?" inquired Sir Thomas.

"She was recovering from an illness—one of the nicest little women you ever saw—in fact, all but well," observed Dr. Ashe. "I had seen her in the morning—for I attended her with all her children—and told her that the next day she might move into the drawing-room. That was about eleven o'clock. By five in the afternoon she was dead."

"What from?" inquired the physician.

"Poison, Sir Thomas."

"Poison!" echoed Sir Thomas Elliot.

"Strychnia."

"By whom administered?"

"There was the question," said Dr. Ashe. "It never has been cleared up from that day to this. With some people, poor Goring got the credit of it; but I believe the man to have been as innocent as I was. Nay, I am sure of it."

Sir Thomas Elliot rose from his chair in a perturbed manner. His son about to marry the daughter of a man suspected of ——! He sat down again.

"The case was published in the *Lancet*," resumed Dr. Ashe. "Of course without casting any conjectures as to who had administered it."

"I remember now—I remember reading it," cried Sir Thomas. "But it never struck me that—What were the grounds for suspecting the husband?"

"In my opinion, I say, there were no grounds," repeated Dr. Ashe. "A few only may have thought so, in just the first blush of the affair. I never saw a more affectionate husband than Goring was; and he had nothing to gain by her death. Everything to lose."

"The insurance money," suggested Mr. Warburton.

"Nonsense! I know some cast it in his teeth: very unjustly, if they had only considered the facts. Mrs. Goring had a clear income of three hundred a year, an annuity which died with her. Did not go to her husband or children, understand, Sir Thomas; absolutely died with her. She had insured her own life some years before for three thousand pounds for the benefit of her children. But what is a sum of three thousand pounds in comparison with three hundred a year? And Goring did not touch the money; he invested it for the children. He was a malignant man."

"Was he accused of the crime?" asked Sir Thomas.

"Oh, no, no; nothing of that sort. At his wife's interment—I never saw such a crowd in the churchyard before—some voices hissed him.

'Murderer!' 'Poisoner!' that was the extent. But if ever grief was genuine in this world, it was Goring's for the loss of his wife. They were on the wrong scent," muttered Dr. Ashe in a lower tone.

"Dr. Goring, unfortunately, did not show out quite clear upon another point," interrupted Mr. Warburton. "There was a governess residing with them, a Miss Howard, and he was too attentive to her: but Goring was a free man at all times in his manners with women. Some said it was her fault; that she laid herself out to attract him; and, altogether, the affair had given pain and annoyance to Mrs. Goring. So Miss Howard received warning to leave, and the little Gorings were to be sent to school. Before the change was made, Mrs. Goring was poisoned!"

"Was this governess suspected?" inquired Sir Thomas Elliot.

"I don't know what other people may have done," interposed Dr. Ashe, warmly. "I had my opinion upon the point, and always shall have. But it does not do to speak out one's opinions too freely. There was no proof."

"Where was the strychnia procured?"

"From Goring's own surgery. At least, such was the conclusion drawn, for he kept some there. Though whether the bottle had been touched or not he could not himself tell. Mrs. Goring had dined, and was asleep on her bed, the nurse having gone to her dinner. During her absence, the poison was introduced into a glass of water, which, as was customary, stood at the bedside, and Mrs. Goring, when she awoke, drank of it. Goring was in the garden the whole of this time, never came into the house at all, as the servants testified, until aroused by the screams in Mrs. Goring's room. Miss Howard was in the dining-room, which adjoined the surgery, and the servants equally testified that if she had quitted it to go upstairs, they must have heard her. So the case was wrapped in mystery, and remains so."

"The worst feature was Dr. Goring's marrying the woman afterwards," observed Mr. Warburton.

"Marrying *her*! the governess!" exclaimed Sir Thomas Elliot.

"He did. She was dismissed from the house on Mrs. Goring's death; but twelve months afterwards, Miss Howard became Mrs. Goring."

"Why, the man must have been mad!" uttered Sir Thomas.

"He was wrong there," said Dr. Ashe. "I told him so. But what I said went for nothing, for he was bent on it. His death was a mystery also: I could never fathom it. He married this girl, Sir Thomas, went off with her for a fortnight, and came back, so changed that we hardly knew him. He started on the journey a gay, healthy man; he returned wasted in frame, broken in spirits, and in two months was laid in his first wife's grave. There was no particular complaint, but he wasted away to death; literally *pined* away it seemed."

"And pined in silence," added Mr. Warburton, "for he never would acknowledge himself ill."

"I see, gentlemen," returned Sir Thomas, "it was a bad affair altogether, from beginning to end; one not too well calculated to bear the light of day."

"At any rate, the light of day has never been thrown upon it," answered Dr. Ashe.

"And the daughter of such a man shall never become William's wife," mentally concluded Sir Thomas Elliot. "But, to go back to the next room, gentlemen," he added aloud. "My opinion——"

We need not follow their consultation for their patient. It came to an end, and Sir Thomas Elliot went steaming up to town again by the first train.

(To be concluded.)



THE SAILOR'S DREAM.

A SAILOR on a lonely shore
 Dreams of the happy days to come,
 When some brave ship shall bear him home,
 Ah! home again once more!

He dreams of walking once again
 Up the still village street until
 He leans upon a window-sill,
 Looks through a window-pane.

He sees his dear ones sitting round
 His blazing hearth, and hears them say,
 "Oh, weary-long is every day
 Until our dear one's found!"

He dreams, until his eyes grow dim,
 Of all the gladness that might be,
 If that brave ship should cross the sea
 Which will not come for him.

Better his lonely life—made fair
 With dreams of hope, undying, sweet—
 Than if he journeyed home to meet
 An infinite despair!

For loving wife and children three
 Are laid beneath the daisied grass;
 And all he dreams is as it was;
 Never again can be!

E. NESBIT.

CARMEN SYLVA.

IN the year 1843 there was joy in the palace home of the Prince of Wied and his consort, the Duchess of Nassau, over the birth of a little daughter. They bore her soon to the baptismal font, and there, in prince-like fashion, they gave her three names, Elizabeth Pauline Ottilia, little dreaming that she would one day choose for herself a name that would cause all these names which they bestowed upon her to be forgotten.

The Prince of Wied was a man of much intellect, and still greater culture; moreover, he was a man who held enlightened and advanced opinions; especially was his creed very broad and bright on the subject of female education. His little daughter Elizabeth had scarcely set her small feet within the walls of her school-room when he began to interest himself, in the most lively and practical way, in all she was taught. As the girl grew older, the task of superintending her education became more and more of a joy and pride to him; for her quick intelligence, her retentive memory and her active imagination developed, as the years went on, with the marvellous rapidity of some rare tropical plant. She delighted most of all in music and poetry, and at an early age played on the piano with taste and feeling, and wrote verses that were full of sweetness and promise.

We can catch bright glimpses of her at this period; we can see the slight figure of the graceful girl glancing in and out like a flash of light among the trees of the forest, as her light step scarce crushes the spicy scent out of the herbs and flowers that are woven into the grassy carpet beneath her feet; we can mark the half-dreamy, half-thoughtful expression in the large, liquid blue eyes, as she lifts them towards the streaks of radiant summer sky that appear here and there between the waving branches; we can hear her clear young voice break out into some sweet strain of the fatherland as she answers playfully the song of thrush or blackbird perched on a twig hard by. Then we can watch her run home to the warm shelter of her parents' love, to be at once their sunbeam and their flower.

Wherever she goes we notice that she has frequently one companion that is preferred above all others, and this is a brother a few years younger than herself. He seems to have awakened in her already the mother instinct, which is the precious birthright of womanhood; for she protects and guides him, while at the same time she makes him the confidant of all her dreams and aspirations.

It was a fair, firm tie that bound that brother and sister together; a fair, firm tie, but one destined to be soon snapped asunder. The boy died early of some childish disease, and the girl was left to tread

the road of life without him. So great was the grief of the young Princess Elizabeth at this loss, that her health and spirits were seriously affected by it, and she fell into a state of physical weakness and mental despondency rare at so early an age as hers, when the most passionate storm of grief is generally soon forgotten. Her parents grew anxious and unhappy about their daughter, and felt that prompt measures must be taken if they were to prevent her following her brother. Change of scene was what the medical men most recommended ; and so they sent her to Russia, to the almost maternal care of her aunt, the Archduchess Hélène.

Her mind and body gradually recovered their tone. The salon of the Archduchess was more brilliantly lit with the sparkle of wits and the flame of genius than the salon of any other woman in Europe. Amid such congenial surroundings the young Princess woke up gradually once more to the joy and sweetness of life, and body and mind regained their elasticity and vigour.

Professors and masters of all arts and sciences were employed to complete her education, and she made rapid progress in all she undertook to learn. More than all her other studies, however, were music, poetry and architecture preferred by her. Her verses began to have the ring of more than a school-girl's lively fancy in them ; she delighted in dreams of fair palaces that if she were a queen she would build ; she learned to play the organ and piano with wondrous skill, her fingers now lightly running over the keys, now calling forth strains of dreamy, tender sadness that made the listener weep he knew not why. Rubinstein was her master, and he called her, with pride, his favourite pupil.

Thus years sped on, till the Princess Elizabeth was a full-blown rose of womanhood. She had a form whose poetry of motion was like the swaying of the branches of her well-loved forests when the summer breeze sweeps over them ; she had a face, the delicate, refined beauty of which was all instinct with the fire of thought and feeling, where imagination flashed in the eyes, and intellect sat enthroned on the broad white forehead ; she had a brain waking up to a consciousness of its own power, she had a heart that beat in tune with all things high and noble.

It was just then that a sudden blight fell for a second time upon her.

The Prince of Wied died, a comparatively young man, and the blow caused the Princess Elizabeth to fall into much the same condition of mental and bodily collapse as she had done when she lost her brother. This time, however, a better and more effectual cure was at hand than even the Archduchess Hélène could devise.

Her mother, to cheer her and divert her mind, took her to Berlin, and there she fell in with Prince Charles of Roumania. Similarity of tastes and opinions soon caused an attachment to spring up between him and the Princess Elizabeth, and the colour returned quickly to her cheeks, and the light to her eyes, when she was wooed

and won, and carried off as a bride by her young husband to his southern home.

In Roumania, her beauty, her gracious manners, her sweet, sympathetic nature soon caused the new princess to become the darling of an enthusiastic but half-civilised people. The joy of the royal pair and of the whole nation was completed when Elizabeth became the mother of a son.

But the glad peals that welcomed the birth of an heir were rapidly to be changed into a funeral knell. In spite of all the warm sunshine of love around him the child faded away like a blossom smitten by a frosty wind, and died. This was a heavier blow for Elizabeth than even the deaths of her brother and father had been. The result was a long and dangerous illness, from which she partially recovered to be told by her medical attendants that she was to be an invalid for the rest of her life, and that nothing but an existence of constant pain and suffering was before her.

The strong love of her husband rebelled against this decree, and he took her to Holland to be under the care of the celebrated Dr. Metzger. His skill and the massage treatment completely restored her to health, and she returned to Roumania to face once more, at her husband's side, life and its duties. It shows that in Carmen Sylva, the poet queen, there must be a strength of feeling such as there is in few women, that thrice she should have been brought by sorrow close to death's door; it shows that there must have been in her a vital force such as there is in few women, or men either, that thrice she should have come back to life, to work, and love again.

Though she had returned to Roumania, to bring with her sunshine in the blessing of her recovered health, the bright gleam was to be of short duration. A dark storm was about to break over Elizabeth and the land of her adoption. The Russo-Turkish war broke out, and Roumania was deeply implicated in the struggle. It was then that the royal lady, who in rank was the first woman in Roumania, showed that she was in truth royal, not only by right of high birth, but by right of her rich stores of heart and sympathy.

Through the military hospitals, arrayed in the simple dress of an ordinary ambulance nurse, with the red cross, the sign of mercy, on her sleeve, went ceaselessly to and fro one graceful figure, one face, which, in its calm brightness, brought light even to acutest physical suffering. Go where she might, the men learned to bless the very sound of their royal Elizabeth's footsteps, and her passage down the long hospital wards was like the passage of a sunbeam sent by God. Well might Roumania's people, when the war was over, show their gratitude by setting up to her honour a statue of her holding a cup of water to a wounded soldier's lips.

After the war, the Queen of Roumania, for such now was her title, found that she had more leisure and liberty to develop her mental gifts than she had ever had before in her checkered story. She

began to write, with the object of going into print in view ; and she set about authorship, not in the dilettante spirit of an amateur, but with the resolute earnestness of a woman who means to make literature her profession.

In process of time her first book appeared, and was received with no small amount of favour by the public. Since then her writings have increased in popularity and have achieved European fame : they bear the true trade-mark of genius, and are all remarkable for womanly refinement and tenderness. Her "*Pensées d'une Reine*," her "*Life of Sorrow*," her "*Contes de Peleck*," etc., have become household words in many homes far away from Roumania, the beloved land of her adoption, whose legends she delights to weave into her prose and verse. Her play of "*Dammerung*" is popular on the German stage. At this present time an opera composed by her is being brought out in Sweden, the country where her sister reigns as Queen. She always writes under the name of "*Carmen Sylva*." The fact that this name has completely superseded her baptismal name of Elizabeth, and that we now almost always speak of her and write of her as *Carmen Sylva*, and hardly ever as *Queen Elizabeth*, is sufficient proof in itself of the celebrity she has gained as an author.

Carmen Sylva has carried out the architectural dream of her girlhood. At *Sinaia*, among the mountains, she has built a palace beautiful enough to have been raised by the magic wand of an Eastern enchantress. There she spends the greater part of the summer, and there she loves to ramble forth, watch the sunset lights play around the distant peaks, and listen to the music made by wind and stream in the hollow gorges. Then she returns to her mountain home, and delights to sit in the splendid music-room, making the organ, the keys of which she touches with masterly skill, tell of all the thoughts and fancies that glide through her fertile brain.

Carmen Sylva loves to welcome at her little court all the brightest geniuses and most intellectual men in Europe. There men of letters, artists and musicians go in and out as dear, familiar guests, and speak and act with the easy freedom of those who are at home. There Gounod dreams of melodies that shall thrill the listening world ; there Alphonse Daudet rests from labours that have given joy to millions. The royal mistress of the palace at *Bucharest*, and the queenly summer home at *Sinaia*, deems it her highest royalty that she is a member of the guild of authors and artists.

Carmen Sylva has now reached middle-age, but her beauty is still bright with the brightness of soul and intellect. Her heart and brain are as full as ever of sympathy and work. For many and many a day to come may the women of Europe turn towards her eyes of reverence and love.

ALICE KING.

GUIDO FONTANA.

CHAPTER III.

THE CITY OF THE DEAD.

A LONG, low line of desolate shore facing the East. A breadth of a hundred yards or so of sand, then a scanty scrub of ragged juniper; a slight rise, and a mingling of vegetable earth with the sea-sand, and consequent growth of wiry grass and a few stunted trees. Behind these—but not more than about three hundred yards from the water—a low face of light grey rock, backed by graduated heights rising in serried series till they mingle with and are lost amid the mountains that bound the far horizon.

The face of that pale grey rock is honeycombed by innumerable tombs, cut in the living stone, and in which, in ages long gone by, unknown generations have lain. Now the tombs are the home of the bat and lizard, the serpent and every hateful creeping thing that can live without water and that delights in ruin and decay.

The tombs are of all sizes. Some consist in but a single chamber, some are composed of two or three, one within the other, and forming a very house in which the dead could sleep and the living linger to lament their loss. In all there is a low stone ledge—probably for the convenience of mourners; in most a Columbarium. Many are richly adorned with sculpture—frieze and figure, group and garland mingling, now and again, with half-obliterated inscriptions in Greek or Latin—at times in both languages. Over the doorways of some may be seen the sculptured fish that betokened the inhabitant to have been a follower of the newly-promulgated Christian Religion.

In a few of the larger tombs the traces of frescoes still remain—the reds and blues glaring out in almost pristine gaudiness—the rest of the colours a confused mass of nondescript hue.

The entrance to many of these tombs is choked by bramble and briar, through which nought but the serpent can glide; others are open to the light and the free air of heaven—to the early sunshine and the soft sea breeze. Silence, however, reigns in all. They are forsaken even by the spirits of those who once were therein housed. And, indeed, why should they have lingered on? The last mourner, too, has long gone to his rest—the ashes once so carefully cherished have been dispersed—nothing now remains but the chance visit of the prowling fox, or the yet rarer step of the casual traveller; the spider now spins where the mourner mused; the beetle crawls

where the loving wept. No—truly the spirits have done wisely to spread their wings and flee from the last scene of their earthly abode to a fairer home.

The sun was about to rise. The cloudless sky was a dome of opal, the sea a motionless mirror, over whose breast bands of blue and purple lay stretched. So light was the swell of the slumbering water that not the slightest swish was heard as it softly kissed the sands.

Far out amid the blue a shoal of dolphins were sporting—leaping with delight—rejoicing at the birth of another day. No further sign of life was visible, save the fleets of pink and blue *Medusæ* floating onwards in slow, voluptuous motion.

Brighter and brighter grows the zenith—radiant—ever more radiant, till, at last, a sheaf of golden arrows suddenly speed across the waters and fall in splintering showers upon the face of those ancient tombs.

But the silence yet remained unbroken. For a second the hoarse chirp of a *cigala* might have been heard; then that, too, ceased as abruptly as it had awoke. Not a bird twittered—not a bee hummed—it was as if a curse lay upon the spot.

Suddenly and silently a figure shows itself at the door of one of the gaping sepulchres. A woman clad in grey—a woman with a mass of snowy hair knotted behind her head—a woman with the seal of yearning and despair stamped upon every feature.

Ceaseless grief had withered her beauty as the simoon scorches the blossom; gnawing anguish had wasted her form as the greedy worm battens upon the life of the stately poplar.

With arms crossed upon her breast she gazed forth from her lair upon the slumbering sea, scanning it with eager, wistful eyes; then she turned to the left—then to the right, with a searching, expectant air that, for a moment, imparted some show of animation to her pale, suffering face. Nothing met her gaze, however, and once more her features resumed their habitual expression of stony despair. With bowed head and hands yet folded over her bosom as if to keep her heart from utterly breaking, she stepped forth from the threshold of the tomb into the full glory of the morning light. Heedless of sunshine and heat, she seated herself upon a low stone and commenced slowly rocking herself to and fro, murmuring softly the while: “My Guido—my son—my poor, poor son!”

The blasted cork tree which threw its weirdly fantastic arms up into the cloudless azure above her head was no truer picture of desolation than was that poor creature as she sat there.

The tomb she had just left was one of the largest in the City of the Dead. It had been the resting-place of a great lady—the wife of a Roman governor. Over the doorway two writhing serpents were carved, and just below them a double inscription in Latin and Greek. That inscription read as a mockery now, for within not even the dust of the dead remained. It spoke of “Eternal grief,” “Ever-

lasting resting-place." Folly! Unclean things fought and fed where the patrician lady had once rested.

Again and again Greca raised her bowed head to gaze around in search of some token that might herald the approach of at least one of the two beings she loved most upon earth.

Nothing—absolutely nothing, save the tremulous heat glaring from the face of the rock—the sandy waste, with its patches of ragged shrub—the slumbering sea beyond.

She resumed her old position—recommenced her weary rocking.

Since that fatal evening on which she had been hastily summoned by a trembling, pale-faced neighbour to see her son—her Guido—in the midst of a detachment of police, life had been for her one long continuance of torture. Not even the Professor (who providentially turned up a day or so after the blow had fallen) could rouse her into anything like hopeful animation. And when all was over, when the second sentence was about to be put into execution, and when she, after infinite difficulty and no end of wearisome formalities, was admitted to bid her boy farewell, it would have been hard for any not in her intimacy to have recognised in the prematurely-aged and white-haired, broken woman the proud and exulting mother of a few months back. The good Professor did all he could to rouse her. He forced her to travel for a few weeks, but was obliged to acknowledge that change of scene only made her worse. She took interest in nothing—seemed only unceasingly to pine for a return to the old home, where every stick and stem could speak to her of the son she had lost.

They returned.

Months and months passed. Then one day, after many mysterious absences, the Professor suddenly opened his heart to Greca. He told her all that he had done and planned—all that he hoped and feared. It infused a wild, feverish life into the desolate woman's heart, which betrayed itself in ceaseless restlessness such as would soon have worn out a constitution less tenacious than hers.

Her state, moral as well as material, mended, however. Where the doctor had before had to wrestle with apathy, he had now to combat excitement.

The undertaking was about as serious a one as could well be imagined, and failure, as well as success, involved consequences which had carefully to be weighed and provided against.

But rare intelligence, unswerving affection, unstinted money, a certain favourable combination of circumstances, and, more than all, untiring energy, at last produced their fruits. The plot was organised with a fair prospect of success, and the hour of its final execution had struck.

Greca had sojourned in Cagliari for a while under the roof of trustworthy friends of the Professor, to whom they owed their all, and for whom they would have sacrificed everything. She had stayed with

them in the quality of a relation, and not a soul in the whole town besides them ever dreamed that the dark-eyed, white-haired, weary woman had an only child serving his time in the near establishment of San Bartolomeo.

In his heart the Professor had condemned it as an imprudence, but he had been unable to resist her prayers and entreaties to be suffered, at least, to inhabit for a while the vicinity of her son's place of confinement. He at last had yielded.

What long hours she passed gazing with yearning wistfulness upon the walls that held her Guido, everyone can easily imagine. She had gazed at them under the light of early dawn—in the glow of the mid-day sun, beneath the white moonlight—gazed at them till the tears scorched and blinded, till, in a paroxysm of longing agony, she had flung herself upon the ground and wailed forth the anguish that was too bitter to be borne. And once she had seen him! Her Guido had passed within a few feet of her, amid the bustle and turmoil of the vessels unloading at the wharf. She had heard his voice, too, in reply to some observation from a fellow convict. Her hostess, who was with her, had divined the whole—had felt the steely clutch upon her arm, marked the stifled sob—and had guessed which was Guido among the men passing before them.

Maternal love had lent strength, had restrained the impulse to rush forward and fling longing, loving arms around the convict; and the son little dreamed that the closely-veiled woman, whose dress he almost brushed in passing, was his own adored mother.

How all this, and much more that it would be needless to relate, surged through Greca's brain as she cowered there!

The sun burned down in the fiery fierceness of noon. Everything around lay simmering in sunshine, steeped in light. Yet still she sat on, unheeding of personal discomfort, her whole soul engrossed in one thought, her whole being centred in the long wistful gaze with which she from time to time swept the horizon.

Mechanically she drew a piece of bread from her pocket and commenced eating it. It nearly choked her, but she knew she must do something to keep up her strength for the unknown that lay before her. There were more substantial victuals hidden in the tomb behind her; she could not have touched them—they must be shared by her son.

As yet nothing but the snake gliding on its stealthy way had met her eye, nought but the rustle of the lizard met her ear.

Then, all at once—it must have been near two—a boat suddenly rounded the little point from the north. It kept close in to shore, and was rowed by two men, while a third sat steering. Her heart beat to bursting, and the blood, rushing to her head, obscured her sight so that she could distinguish nothing clearly.

Were they friends? Were they foes?

She hastily drew back into the depths of the tomb behind her.

Minutes passed. They seemed ages to her. She heard the sound of voices, the grating of the keel upon the shore, the clatter of oars flung upon the gunwale. Whoever they might be, they had landed. Holding her breath, she stole to just within the entrance and tried to listen. In vain. Then the thud of heavy steps upon the sand drove her back once more to the darkest depths. Was it the voice of a friend that she was about to hear calling to her to "come forth" to renewed life and hope? Or was it to be the harsh command of the law to surrender? Her nails dug themselves into the stuff that covered her breast.

But, without halting, the steps passed on. Then they again died away.

She listened—listened—listened—till every nerve seemed to vibrate, and a humming sound awoke within her brain.

Suspense was no longer bearable; if she had had to remain longer thus, she must have shrieked aloud. She sprang forwards and carefully looked out. It was not her Guido who had passed—she would, even upon the sand, have recognised his step among a thousand; and, besides, he, if he came at all, would come from landways, and not by sea. Guido—Guido—where was he at that moment? Making his weary way across the country—in the hands of his pursuers—shot down, perhaps? The thought pierced her like a knife.

She advanced her head softly beyond the lintel; she looked out. Her heart gave a bound of thankfulness; there, seated upon a stone not ten yards off, sat the Professor, trying to obtain a little shade from a group of scraggy junipers, and busily mopping his streaming face with the old familiar red silk handkerchief.

Greca rushed forwards. "Guido?" broke from her lips.

"Will be here ——"

"When—oh, when?"

"Probably soon after nightfall; I cannot tell exactly; that must depend upon circumstances."

"God be thanked! Oh, God be thanked!"

"All I really know is that he got away safe from San Bartoioimeo, and that the whole place has been in a ferment ever since. I wish I could have been there to see it."

"My God, make me grateful for this; make me grateful!"

She fell upon her knees and turned her poor worn face up into the full light of the golden day.

"My Guido, my Guido!" she continued to murmur softly.

Then, for the first time, the Professor was able to read the ravages that grief had made. He gently stretched out his hand and raised her. She seated herself at his side.

"It seems that they lost all trace of him close to the cliffs of St. Elia. The police think that he must have fallen into the sea."

"Killed, perhaps ——?"

"As much as you or I. The police are fools. So much the better. They think he is drowned, or pretend to think so, in order to screen themselves. Well, let them think what they please. I know better than that. The clothes that I had hidden in the Fortezza Vecchia are gone; so are the provisions. That's quite enough for the present."

The Professor smiled his own peculiar, quiet smile. That smile always broke over his honest Piedmontese features when he was inwardly satisfied with himself and the world at large. Greca had seen it a hundred times, and had learned to interpret it aright. It quieted her more than any words could have done.

"And now, my dear, let us leave Guido to reach here as best he can, and think over what yet remains for us to do."

He laid the red handkerchief upon his bald head, and then, taking out a little bag from his pocket, carefully began the manipulation of a cigarette.

"You see, all is ready for the arrival of the poor boy, and, once here, we can start directly. I am sure of my two men yonder, and quite as sure of those left behind in the felucca. She is anchored round that point yonder. Once on board, we have nothing more to fear."

"But if the felucca should be seen ——?"

"She won't. She is hidden from seawards in a little bay that I discovered when I was here three years or so ago."

Greca seized the good man's hand and kissed it in passionate gratitude.

"Oh, what should we have done without you?" she murmured. The words were commonplace enough, but the tone and action told all she felt.

"You see, I am here upon one of my archæological expeditions, in case any stupid questions should be asked. I am not so quite unknown as to render further explanations necessary."

Here the familiar smile appeared once more. Unwittingly he gave a passing thought to certain articles that had lately appeared in most of the papers, and to the flattering reception he had been summoned to receive from the king.

What a comedy it was, too, to be smiled upon by Royalty just at the very moment when he was deep in plotting escape for one of his Majesty's prisoners! He had enjoyed the audience with a double zest.

"And in the whole business, I defy the most keen-sighted and sharp-nosed policeman ever invented to scent out my having had anything to do with Guido's flight."

He said nothing about the little fortune it had already cost him.

"If needful I can account for every day of my life during the last year and more, and bring very big people indeed to bear witness to the truth of what I affirm."

"Ah, if only Guido can get here in safety!"

"Of course he will get here in safety. Why should he not? Guido is no baby—he knows quite well what he has to do, and how to do it. Don't you be uneasy about that."

He mentally added that the experience of the last few years must have largely contributed to the opening of the poor lad's eyes—though not perhaps in a manner quite compatible with the usual notions of good education.

They talked over the ways and means—or, rather, the Professor talked and Greca listened—yet, still, the hours seemed terribly long to them both. Dinner, if dinner it could be called, was taken in the coolest recess of one of the airiest tombs; the provisions that the Professor had taken care to bring with him being added to those already in store. The meal was spread upon the broad, low slab on which, in centuries long swept into the womb of time, the form of the dead had lain, or the weeping survivor sat.

The Professor insisted upon Greca's making a good meal. It was ridiculous, he said, that she should starve herself. It was worse than ridiculous: it was rightdown sinful. A moment of physical weakness on her part might, perhaps, bring about some complication or another that, in its turn, could jeopardise the success of the whole enterprise. No: eat she must. So Greca eat, and, in justice, was obliged to confess to feeling all the better for having done so.

But, linger as they might, they could not sit there all the afternoon. So Greca was ordered to go and get a good sound sleep in the darkest, dreamiest place within the tombs that she could find, while the Professor roamed about, examining sculptures and inscriptions, as he had done once before on that same spot years ago. It served to occupy his mind and somewhat to allay the anxiety he could not help feeling. Nor was this all: it gave such a natural colouring to the appearance of himself and his men upon the place that, even had the police made their appearance, it would not have mattered so very much.

Greca had received strict orders not to stir from the tomb into which she had retired until the Professor himself should come to fetch her. She had eaten to please him—the sleeping, however, was quite a different matter. She tried right loyally to obey, but utterly in vain. There she lay in one of the inner chambers, gazing wearily at the Columbarium on the one side and at the blurred frescoes on the other. The dilapidated faces loomed dimly forth from the opposite wall; the faint light gave them a spectral appearance. Sleep! she could almost have laughed to herself as she tried to obey the Professor's behest.

Ah! would those weary hours never pass? That blazing sun never sink? She sickened at the very thought of its beating—beating—beating down outside in its red glare and wrathful intensity.

Sickened as she pictured to herself her son exposed to its scourge—harassed—faltering—fainting, perhaps, beneath his burden of privation, anxiety and fatigue. She turned and turned restlessly, ever trying some other posture.

In vain.

Little by little, however, a strange sensation took possession of her. Every faculty seemed to acquire quintuple power; a succession of thrills ran through her entire frame, neither painful nor unpleasant, to be succeeded by a peculiar sensation of cold at the back of her head. Then followed a hot wave—then another—as if the fevered blood were surging up in measured beat to her brain. Then another thrill more icy than before.

Walls and vaulted roof seemed to melt into nought. She saw, heard, and felt as she had never seen, heard, and felt before—it was like floating away through space itself, with no more body or weight than that of a spirit borne upon the wings of the wind.

A deep forest. Trees rising around as they had risen there for centuries, and with here and there some giant veteran lying low and rotting within the green shroud spread over it by a thousand parasite plants. Masses of pink and white cyclamen blooming forth from every crevice, nestling amid velvety moss, nodding from rocky cleft; here a tangle of trailing climbers, there an open space steeped in sunshine.

Further yet: a thicket of lithe oleander in full bloom, but with their blossoms somewhat paled from the shade in which they are growing. Higher still, a belt of thorny shrubs such as seem never to have been penetrated by man, and within, on the summit of the rise, one of those mysterious towers called Nurraghe, whose builders none can name, whose birth is shrouded in night.

A low, massive tower, set together with mortarless blocks, such as the boasted mechanical means of the present day would shrink from attempting to move. Blocks quarried none can guess where; blocks cut and fitted with a precision that tells of hands as practised as powerful. She gazes on it with a curious sort of interest; gazes as if she were another being altogether, and no longer the weary woman tossing and turning within the tomb down yonder.

She sees a man within the tower. His dress is that of a well-to-do farmer; he has a wallet at his side.

She recognises him; or, rather, her other self recognises him. It is Guido.

She struggles to reach him, but an invisible power is holding her back. He comes forth from his hiding-place and, wallet upon shoulder, sets forward upon his journey.

The sun is sinking slowly in the west.

Guido halts at a little spring that trickles silently down from a mass of dark red rock. He drinks a deep draught, washes his face and hands, and then sets forth once more.

But what is it that she now sees? Out from the ruins and debris of that old Roman mine a something has stealthily crept—a something that, in spite of her efforts, she cannot clearly define.

Is it a serpent? Is it a man? Now it is the one—now the other. There, now it is both!

It is one of the serpents carved over the doorway of the Roman princess's tomb. But the face? For it has a human face—small, vicious eyes, and an expression full of mistrust and guile.

It wriggles forth upon the track of the wanderer; passes where he has passed—halting where he has halted—never taking those hateful eyes from off him.

Had she but the power to warn him!

Guido has crossed the forest, and has entered upon a more open tract. Here woods alternate with natural fields, upon which the short, thick grass grows green and sweet, and across which innumerable sheep-tracks intercept each other.

The serpent is still there; closely following every deviation and turn.

How can it escape Guido's notice? Why, once it was quite close to him for a moment—glaring up at him from behind some bushes! Yes, the face is human, but then the expression!

On Guido tramps. Now lost to sight in some rocky hollow—now reappearing upon some rising ridge. Ever onwards in the direction of the sea.

Lower sinks the sun—longer grow the shadows. The heat is still intense, but the odour of brine begins at intervals to mingle with the sickly scent of the fainting flowers.

Lower—lower—lower. The golden disk touches the distant mountain crest. It seems to halt for a moment as if to fling a last, lingering farewell to earth, then suddenly drops behind the purple curtain.

The freshness of evening floats up from the waters.

The serpent grows dim amid the gathering shadows. Greca can no longer follow its gliding. As the deepening gloom swallows it from view, she fancies she hears an ominous hiss.

That may be but the sound of the waking wavelets pressing forwards to kiss the shore.

On comes the traveller.

The last ridge is crossed. He is just above the long, low line of tenantless tombs.

There—the first star gleams forth from overhead; Guido's first step grates upon the sand below.

And the serpent?

Greca—the real Greca—starts from her rocky bed. Surely that was the Professor's voice? She springs forward and is folded in her son's embrace.

Night, dark, mysterious, beautiful, hung heavily over earth and

sea. No light save the soft glimmer of the stars which mirrored themselves in the waters—vault above and reflection below forming one immense globe of unspeakable glory.

Everything was prepared—nothing now remained but to embark in the boat in which the two men were already seated ready at their oars. The Professor, followed by Greca and her son, led the way down to the beach.

Then a sudden cry like that of a night-bird arose from a near patch of lentisks. Seized with momentary terror, Greca started at the sound and stopped. Looking round, she caught sight of something stealing through the bushes; at the same moment an exclamation of dismay broke from the Professor.

A large boat, heavily manned, swept round the point, and, looming like a phantom through the gloom, lay to in such a position as to render his own boat of no further avail.

The gleam of arms and uniform was faintly visible.

"Surrender," echoed a loud, commanding voice; "surrender in the name of the law!"

Then from the brushwood around dim forms are seen to rise on every side like spirits from their tombs. They look gigantic in the gloom; they appear innumerable to the straining eyes of the little party; they draw nearer and form a circle around the fugitives; then halt.

"Guido Fontana, I arrest you as an escaped convict. Greca Fontana and Giovanni dell 'Nero, I arrest you likewise as abettors of his flight."

The officer's voice rang forth loud and clear. It fell like ice upon the hearts of those to whom it was directed.

"Run for it, Guido," whispered the Professor; "it is the last chance."

The words had been softly uttered, but eager, listening ears had either caught the sound, or divined their import.

An ominous click resounded through the darkness.

For a second Guido hesitated. The case was a desperate one. There was no hope of getting off—in his heart he well knew that—but there was the chance of their shooting him down as he ran, and thus putting an end to a life he no longer cared to preserve.

He pressed his mother convulsively to his breast; kissed her as if his whole soul had concentrated itself upon his clinging lips. Then there was a sudden bound—a momentary collision—a policeman struck to earth. Guido's lithe form was dimly discernible running at full speed along the shore.

"The unhappy boy," moaned the Professor; "why does he not take to the woods? He must have lost his senses."

But he hadn't. Aim would have been difficult and uncertain amid the bushes—upon the white sand it would probably be just.

A volley of oaths—a scattered discharge—a piercing shriek.

Greca reeled and was caught in the Professor's arms. They were instantly surrounded. A large blood-stain upon the bosom of her dress showed where an ill-directed bullet had struck her.

The shriek had reached Guido's ear. No bullet could have stayed his course more effectually. He stopped and turned. Almost at the same instant his pursuers were upon him.

They led him back to the group upon the strand.

In its centre lay Greca, her head supported by the Professor, who was kneeling beside her. Soldiers, policemen, boatmen stood around them—pity and consternation upon their rough faces. Not a word was spoken. Every eye was fixed upon the dying woman. For dying she was. The life-blood had been staunched for the moment, but that was all. The Professor, while supporting her with one arm, was holding a handkerchief to the wound with the other.

Greca made a motion to cover up her breast, which lay partly exposed. One of the bystanders, a young sergeant, stepped forward and laid his handkerchief reverently across her bosom. She thanked him with a look.

At this moment Guido was brought up.

"Back—back," cried the officer in command; "don't you see—?" But it was too late. Guido had caught sight of his mother lying there. He would have wrenched himself free from those that held him, but there was no need. They let him go, contenting themselves with drawing up the circle somewhat closer. There was no thought of escape in Guido's mind at that moment.

Frantic with grief he flung himself down beside his mother.

"Mother—mother," he moaned. "What is it? What have they done to you?"

Greca opened her heavy eyes and gazed up at her son. A faint smile played over her features. And what a smile! The essence of all earthly love and the foretaste of heavenly peace commingled!

"Guido—my Guido," she softly murmured. There was a pause.

Then she moved one arm as if to embrace him. Her strength failed her. Guido bent over her—his face close to hers. Again the smile broke forth—fainter than before, but, if possible, even purer and sweeter. Then with a sudden convulsive effort one arm was flung round her son's neck, while the other was raised to heaven. The smile brightened. Then she drew his lips to hers.

A long, clinging kiss, one deep-drawn sigh, and, with her right hand still pointing to the stars above her son's head, the mother's soul floated into Eternity.

Guido is still dragging out his weary life in a Bagnio.

The Professor has left Italy, never to return.

A. B.

THE LYNNS OF LINNTOWER.

BY ROSA MACKENZIE KETTLE, AUTHOR OF "THE MISTRESS OF
LANGDALE HALL," ETC. ETC.

IN some parts of Scotland, spring is very tardy and yet premature. There are days of unclouded brilliancy and warm sunshine, while yet the snow drifts to great depths among the hills and lies smoothly on the braes.

Sheltered underneath high wooded crags from the cruel north-easterly gale lay a garden and a cottage: I mention its surroundings first, for they were of much more size and importance than the dwelling. Great care had been bestowed upon the beds, and borders, and smooth greensward; while on the abode of living beings there was little ornament except well-pruned fruit trees.

These were cultivated more for utility than beauty. Not an inch of the sunny south wall was wasted in mere ornament for the pleasure of the inmates of the cottage. On the front, where the aspect was most favourable, grew a few apricot trees, carefully protected now from the keen blast; one of the Moor-Park species—of which, after a certain age, one bough dies annually, but which was in its prime—and a fine golden plum. Only the north side and a portion swept by the easterly blast were abandoned to hardy roses and a Virginian creeper. Even this was now leafless, showing no trace of colour. Below were currant bushes nailed against the wall.

There had been a week milder than usual, even in that sheltered situation. Spring flowers had come up and blossomed early in the rich mould of the borders. Like the turtle, the crow and the swallow, they know their time, and, except under very exceptional circumstances, come to gladden us when it arrives.

Now they were paying the price of their temerity. After they expanded, snow fell heavily, crocus and aconite, snowdrop and hepatica, bowed their pretty heads beneath it, but lifted them again, almost uninjured, when the spring sunshine melted that heavy weight.

They were planted, as is the English custom, in the beds and borders, not in the grass, and, consequently, after the flowers withered, their tender leaves and stalks escaped falling under the mower's scythe. Undisturbed from year to year, they grew and multiplied, purple, white, golden and lilac clumps of crocus and snowdrop, arranged alternately. Here and there pink, white and blue hepaticas and more timid primroses and polyanthus peeped forth, and even, under veiling snow wreaths, a few lingering Christmas roses and buds of wallflowers.

But the neighbouring mountains wore their white wintry hoods;

and, at their base, masses, which look so feathery while falling, yet are so heavy, lay pure and soft and white. Beneath the snowdrifts many a patient sheep lay hidden, safer than in the open, but many more had perished during the recent sudden storm.

Trains had been retarded, snow ploughs had been busy; traffic had been nearly at a standstill through the north country for the last week.

A girl was standing on the steps under the porch at the entrance of the cottage, scattering crumbs for the birds. Not poultry—the garden was too precious to permit their intrusion from the back premises—but robins, finches, blackbirds and sparrows. They came close to her; the robins fed from her hand. She was tall and well-proportioned; not slender and willowy, like women brought up in cities, but with strength and agility in every motion, health in her warm, clear complexion, and security in her firm yet elastic tread.

But there was a cloud upon her brow, sadness in every gesture. The little birds seemed aware of it, and cooed and twittered, and clustered round as if to comfort her. Her movements were gentle. She had learnt the secret of taming, by her stillness and serenity, the wild creatures round her dwelling, and taught them not to fear her.

They all swooped away when suddenly a large retriever dashed into the hitherto charmed circle at her feet. His curly hair was matted and tangled, and there was a wistful, weary look in his eyes as though he sorely needed food and rest, but he would not eat the bread she offered him. He laid his paw on her arm, and looked up in her face, beseechingly, with his large brown faithful eyes full of tears and love.

"What is it, Hector?" she said in pure English, putting her arm, though his dark coat was covered with snow and mud, round the dog's neck, and waiting as if she expected an answer. "What can I do for you?" she added, after a pause.

The dog whined and caught the sleeve of her jacket, then he threw back his head and howled, looking first at her and then at the snow-clad moorland and the mountain heights.

As if remembering that a renewal of strength might be needful, he lapped some milk from a saucer inside the porch and ate some morsels of bread from her hand. Then he bounded off, but waited at a short distance, barking, and evidently expecting her to follow him.

In a few moments the birds were again picking up the scattered crumbs undisturbed. The girl had snatched a plaid from a hook in the passage, and was crossing the snow, which still retained the marks of his footprints, with the dog.

In places the ground was covered deeply, but the sagacious guide indicated where his companion might safely tread, often standing still and watching her anxiously when a difficult bit had to be surmounted. In the sunshine the snow had partially melted, but in

the shadows it lay deep and was firm under her light tread. She walked with the easy gait of a mountaineer, one accustomed to face all varieties of weather, and to study all the signs whereby she might win on her way safely.

The dog turned off from the direction of the Pass into the Highlands and went along the track made by his own footprints, which were in places fast filling with water, into some low marshy ground at the foot of the hills. Here walking was more difficult, being impeded by slippery slabs of ice.

At last he stopped short where the snow, which had fallen heavily the night before, had drifted. Hector ran round and round, howling frantically. At last a low moan replied to his appeal; and, out of the great heap of snow, a little silver-haired terrier crept disconsolately. Then they both began to scratch away with all their might at the white mass.

Fortunately that warm fleecy covering had preserved the life buried beneath it. After a few minutes the drifts were upheaved and a human form rose slowly above it, wearily shaking off the flakes. The girl, who had lent her aid vigorously to the dogs, gave a joyful cry, but it was not answered. The tall figure swayed, tottered, and, half-risen, fell prostrate; life was at a low ebb, strength was gone.

But youth is sanguine, and hope had sprung up sufficiently to revive its energies. The half-frozen fingers clasped the warm human hand stretched out to aid him. That touch seemed electrical. The blood once more flowed to the extremities which had curdled round his heart. His fingers grasped hers as she wrapped him in her own plaid, and, unconsciously, drew his shivering form close to her own.

Hector, barking joyously, threw himself upon them, nearly knocking them both down in his vehemence. The little terrier whined affectionately, but lacked strength to do more than lick the hand with which the girl patted and stroked its silvery curls, saying, "Poor little Madge," and feeding her gently with a few crumbs from the pocket of her own jacket.

Guided by a mute sign, she found in the traveller's vest a small flask in which still lurked a few drops of the cordial which had saved his life during the night passed in the snowdrift. He had been too weak to reach it again until her voice and Hector's bark recalled him to life. After drinking what remained in the flask, he found voice enough to utter a few words of thanks; that done, he seemed inclined to sink down to sleep—that fatal repose which, if indulged in under such circumstances, knows no awaking.

The young woman, who knew the danger, roused him peremptorily. She asked no questions; for she knew the dogs, and guessed that the stranger was a visitor at a neighbouring mansion during the fishing season. No doubt his friends would be seeking for him far and wide and might come to her dwelling, since there were very few habitations

at which to inquire for the missing guest, and those few were far apart.

The best thing she could do was to take him home with her and give him food and rest. She, too, was shivering with cold, having parted with her own plaid to warm him. The Hall was too far off for her to attempt to guide him there.

Calling the dogs to follow them, and bidding the stranger lean upon her, the girl drew him away, reluctantly, from the snowdrift. He said no word, but threw the end of the plaid round them both, holding fast by her strong rounded arm.

The touch again revived him ; and so, walking very slowly, clinging together as the icy wind swept past, with the glad bark of the dog to cheer them, and the little weary terrier in the girl's arms, for it had soon tired and begged to be carried, Ellen Redfern led the exhausted Englishman to her solitary home at the foot of the snow-clad hills.

It was a long, toilsome way ; but to pause meant death, so she made him bear onward to shelter and warmth. Once he said, hoarsely, "Leave me," and nearly sank down ; but she raised him tenderly, as a mother might the child clinging to her skirts. At last the cottage, with its cultivated garden, gay borders of crocuses peeping out, on which the declining sun was shining, came in view across the wide waste of snow-clad moorland.

II.

ELLEN REDFERN'S one servant stood in the porch before the cottage, looking out anxiously for her mistress. She was dressed very plainly, in respectable family mourning for her master, who had died in the early part of the previous winter. Though the earth was covered with snow it had come borne on March breezes. It was spring now.

Perhaps Aggy Mervyn shared the superstitious belief that one rescued from a storm, whether on land or sea, bears ill-luck to the roof which shelters him. The snow looked like a wide ocean ; its waves breaking in foam on the breakers were hardly more cruel and dangerous. Her brow clouded over when she saw the two figures battling against the wind, wrapped in one plaid.

She did not advance a step to meet them, but stood shading her eyes with her hand, until the retriever crouched at her feet ; then she patted his head kindly.

"What sent ye here through the snowdrifts, Hector?" she said ; "and what luck have ye brought us? I'm thinking it's but an ill wind and small good."

"Don't say that, Aggy," said her young mistress. "It's life instead of death. This brave dog has saved life to-day, and must be rewarded : let him have food and drink ; and prepare my father's room for this stranger."

Ellen spoke in the tone of one accustomed to prompt obedience ;

and the housekeeper, calling the dog, retired to the kitchen, while her mistress, unwrapping the plaid from her own person, but not withdrawing her arm, led her guest indoors.

It was, as we have said, a very unpretentious abode, but comfortably furnished and neatly kept. A bright fire was burning in the parlour, of which the door stood open, as well as another nearly opposite, leading into an apartment where the master of the house had slept. The inner room was full of choice plants, ranged in order on shelves under a wide bay window intended for their accommodation, with sliding panes and cut up high into the roof.

This room had been added on to the cottage, and with its southern aspect formed a sort of greenhouse. It was thoroughly aired, fires having been kept up night and day there during the cold weather for the sake of the tender plants.

There were curious specimens of foliage growth, of ferns, and various floral delicacies not common in ordinary greenhouses. All were evidently objects of love and constant care; there were blinds to shield them from the danger of sunshine after frost, and not a single dead leaf had been left upon them.

The girl sighed as they passed through the front room. She paused at the open door of the very simply-appointed inner chamber.

"Here you will be quite warm and tranquil," she said, in her pure English tone and quiet manner. "Aggy will bring you some tea here or in the parlour."

The stranger closed the door with a shiver.

"Oh, let it be *here*," he said. "Stay with me—I cannot, after that terrible night, bear to be alone."

He sank down as he spoke on the sofa beside the fire. Ellen stirred the logs, which sparkled cheerily.

For some moments they were both silent. It was, indeed, only by a strong effort that the bonds which bound the stranger's half-frozen tongue were loosened.

Aggy brought in the tea-tray, and stopped to remove some of their guest's wet wrappings. Under his cloak and leggings his raiment, which was of rough tweed, was tolerably dry. She took away with her also Ellen's thick jacket, which was plentifully sprinkled with snow, and her black plumed hat and warm gloves.

The place had a homely, pleasant aspect in the bright blaze of some fir-cones which she had thrown on the burning logs. The firelight sparkled on the glass and china, which were much handsomer than might have been expected. Each article had an inscription upon it, but the stranger was too languid for investigation.

"They were all prizes," said Ellen simply, as her eyes followed his glance. "This one for dahlias at the grand show at York; this for carnations, and these flower-glasses for asters. My lord gave this old-fashioned silver cup to my father when the new conservatories were finished, and his favourite stove plants preserved through

a bitter winter owing to great care and skill. I am very proud of them all."

"No wonder," said the visitor, reviving in the warmth as he drank the fragrant cup of tea she placed before him. "You ought not to wait upon me; but I confess I feel unwilling to stir from this cosy corner."

The Englishman was, indeed, so completely exhausted that he did not notice that the girl, after waiting upon him, touched nothing herself; but moved about the room arranging matters necessary for his comfort, and then silently withdrew.

He was too tired even for thought, and lay back on the couch in the warm, pleasant atmosphere, after she carried away the tea-things, till sleep stole upon him.

During brief intervals of half consciousness he heard some slight muffled sounds from the adjoining room, which had another door into the passage, but nothing roused him. After the dreadful night in the snowdrift the hushed room, even the light symptoms of humanity stirring near him, and the perfume of the violets blooming in wicker cases in the windows, soothed him speedily again into slumber.

He woke up at last when the woman-servant opened the door into the bed-chamber and told him that it was quite ready for his occupation. She brought him, presently, a neatly-arranged supper-tray, and asked if he would require anything more.

"May I see and thank my kind hostess?" he said. "I fear I have brought a great trouble upon you both."

"The trouble is nothing, sir," she said, quietly. "You will find plenty of hot and cold water for your bath, and I will bring a fresh supply to this door in the morning. I hope you will find the bed comfortable and have a good night's rest. My mistress is very sorry that she has no messenger to send to the Hall. The drifts are heavy, and there is a good nine miles of moorland to cross."

She retired without answering his request, making a very respectful, old-fashioned curtsey. Though civil, her manner was extremely reserved. Something in her quiet bearing checked the questions which the stranger longed to ask.

He drew the reading-lamp which she had set down nearer to him, and took without moving, haphazard, some books from a hanging shelf on the wall close to the sofa. The collection was not an inspiring one. It consisted of gardening books and catalogues. Having studied the pictures of prize dahlias, carnations and asters, the proper seasons for various gardening operations in beds and borders, and the best modes of keeping lawns free from weeds, and eradicating them from gravel walks, of laying out parterres and pleasure grounds, he again became drowsy and closed the illustrated volumes and numbers.

His limbs felt stronger. He got up and paced the floor from end to end of the narrow limits, rejoicing in returning strength. Then he

went to the window and opened the hasp of the tightly-fastened shutters.

Outside, all was still and cold as death. It was a bright, frosty night. Stars and moon were shining out intensely, like gas, in the firmament, which was blue as steel.

On one side the snow-clad moorland stretched away to the base of the mountain ranges, which raised their clearly-defined outlines against the sky. On the other lay the sleeping flowers of the garden, now tightly folded up, but the colours of the great masses of crocus—purple and lilac, silver and gold, alternately—distinctly visible. The snowdrops, pearly white, caught the moonbeams as they lifted themselves above the edge of the grassy bank.

A brilliant planet sparkled like fire above the trees that sheltered the garden, and myriads of lesser luminaries, like glow-worms up aloft, twinkled in the frosty night air above the hills, and were reflected in the ice-bound burn which usually wound trickling among the shrubs and flowers.

The Englishman shivered and, closing the shutters, went back to the fireside; but restlessness had come upon him after his intermittent slumbers. He went to the door of the room and opened it, stepping out into the passage, which was lighted by a lamp which burnt more steadily than the twinkling stars.

As he stood, motionless, unwilling to break bounds, yet feeling trammelled, like a caged squirrel, within the precincts assigned to him, he heard the gentle murmur of a voice reading aloud, but not loudly, and he saw that a door at the end of the passage was standing a little open.

Involuntarily he drew nearer, having caught a word or two which he recognised; and feeling that it was no sin to intrude, very gently he entered, without disturbing its inmates, the comfortable, homely kitchen, which glowed with fire and lamp-light.

The girl who had drawn him from under the snowdrift was sitting by the white wood table, with the little silver-haired terrier fast asleep in her arms. The older woman sat opposite, with her knitting lying near her, but unoccupied, her hands clasped, listening to her young mistress. Neither of them noticed the entrance of the stranger.

Ellen Redfern was reading from the Scriptures in a pure, soft voice, and after a few moments they both knelt down and prayed. The young man, keeping in shadow, noiselessly followed their example.

Tears, such as he had not shed since boyhood and which he now restrained, filled his eyes as he heard the girl in simple phrases give thanks for the preservation of the stranger now sheltered beneath her roof, and pray for the safety of all travellers by land and sea.

The English servant fervently responded to her young mistress's prayers and thanksgivings.

When they rose from their knees their visitor came forward and apologised for having ventured to join in their devotions. He could

not say that he regretted his boldness, since it had given him the opportunity of returning thanks for the great mercy extended towards him.

Then he bade them good-night without another word, and retired to his own quarters.

The woman and the girl were both silent. They put away reverentially the large old Bible and Prayer Book, kissed each other like mother and daughter, and retired to rest.

The little dog lay in Ellen's arms, with the long curly hair falling over the sleeve of her black dress as she went upstairs. The moon and stars shone down over the sleeping flowers and on the moorland covered with snow as yet almost untrodden. There were only the slight tracks upon it of the retriever, the youth, and the maiden.

III.

THE peculiar brilliancy of the moon and stars, as is often the case, preluded a day of gloom. Heavily fell the snow in the early morning, obliterating the few footprints on the moor. Snowdrops and crocuses bowed their heads mournfully. Not a trace of their gay purple and gold and lilac petals was visible.

The Englishman chafed at his imprisonment. He had risen early, refreshed by unbroken sleep, after the fatigue and unrest of the previous day and night, hoping to return to his sporting companions and relieve their anxiety.

Breakfast was laid neatly in the parlour, but there was no one to welcome him—fresh eggs, golden butter, well-fried rashers of ham—but there was no white hand extended to greet him, or to pour out the tea—he looked at the goodly viands with distaste. He thought that he would greatly have preferred sharing his pretty hostess and the comely housekeeper's breakfast in the cosy kitchen.

Nevertheless he made a sufficient repast, feeling that he would need all his energies to cross the snow-clad waste. He could not trespass longer on a girl's hospitality, turning her out of her sitting-room, and abridging her scanty resources, when it appeared likely that there might be some difficulty about replenishing her stores in that remote spot.

The birds were twittering in the porch, and, when he went to the house-door, Ellen was feeding them. She accosted him shyly, asking if he had slept well, or whether the wind, which rose after the moon went down, had disturbed him.

"No, I heard nothing," he said; "your lavender-scented pillows lulled me into forgetfulness. It was quite a shock to see this fresh downfall of snow. By the way, what has become of Hector? I see you have Madge still with you."

"Hector was away home soon after he felt assured of your safety," said the girl. "Aggy fed him, and he bounded off across the moor,

straight as the crow flies. Your friends would know that you had found shelter, otherwise he would not have left you, or he would give them no peace till they set out to seek for you."

"I, too, must be up and away," said her guest, looking rather disconsolately across the moor. "Can you give me any landmarks to steer by? I do not care to pass another night in a snowdrift, without the hope of an angel to rescue me."

Ellen looked grave. "You could not find your way without a guide," she said. "It would be tempting Providence. You must wait patiently for awhile. Perhaps some of your friends may come here in search of you."

"Then you must let me be one of the family. I cannot bear to disturb you," said the Englishman. "Tell me if there is anything I can do. Shall I sweep away the snow from your threshold?"

"Yes, you may do that if you like, when it has ceased to fall," said Ellen, laughing. "You would have to do your work all over again in half-an-hour. Aggy thinks that in the afternoon it will be fine. She knows all the signs of the weather, though she was born far from here, on the Northumbrian moors."

"You, too, are English—you have not the least accent—you are my countrywoman?" the young man said inquiringly.

"My mother was English, but my father was a Scotchman. I was born on the other side of the border, and brought up there, till my father wearied of the country and came back to his own land."

"I saw the name of Linntower in some of the books in your sitting-room," said the guest. "Was that where you lived?"

"No," said the girl reservedly; "I was never there in my life. My father knew the place, but he seldom mentioned it. There it was, I believe, that he married my mother, but they must have come away immediately afterwards. I can tell you no more."

She turned away abruptly, and went back into the house, leaving the little basket of crusts which she had been breaking up for the birds on the shelf. The young man abstractedly crumbled the pieces of bread and then returned to the parlour.

He took down some books from a case at the farther end of the room from the hanging shelf containing the gardening books, and tried to amuse himself, but the girl's words haunted him.

Instead of reading their contents he found himself constantly engaged in examining the title-pages, fly-leaves, and covers. There was but little indication of the circumstances and standing of their owners. Some were the property of the girl, Ellen Redfern, with dates of possession at various ages and in different places. Others had belonged to her father, Alexander Redfern.

At last he came to another name, written in a delicate Italian hand, and at this he looked for some time in silence. His face flushed and then paled as he laid that volume on one side.

More than once in the course of that long, dull, solitary morning

the young Englishman looked again at that name and date, always remaining, afterwards, for some time in a deep reverie.

The address in the volume was "Linntower," the time more than twenty years before the day when he sat gazing upon it, sadly and thoughtfully, in the parlour of the Highland cottage.

All things come to an end, and the great snowstorm was not an exception. On the third day after the night passed in the snowdrift, the stranger woke to see the sun shining, the birds singing, the burn running past the garden. A rapid thaw had set in, and he was free.

Aggy Mervyn had found a messenger to send in the early morning to the Hall, and a light carriage was sent to bring back the missing guest. As he shook hands with his young hostess, a slight, perhaps unconscious, pressure was perceptible to both. Ellen blushed and sighed.

With genuine hospitality Miss Redfern had asked no questions, but her guest before they parted had made known his name and something of his private history. He was a distant relation of Lord Linntower, at whose castle near the border Ellen's father had lived for a time, while the new gardens and grounds were being laid out and planted.

Redfern was well-born and well-educated. He had studied landscape gardening and land-surveying, and made a livelihood by them; often staying for months together at gentlemen's places on terms of equality with their families.

But in later life he had become a gardener by profession, after sustaining severe losses of various kinds and much hardship. When his young wife, for whom he had worked hard, died, leaving him with one little girl under charge of her own faithful attendant, Redfern came home to live on his own small patrimony—the cottage on the moorland.

This was all that Ellen could tell her new friend—for in the course of those three short winter days and long evenings they had become friends—and it was enough. He was able to supplement the brief narrative.

He did not tell her more about herself and her parents than she already knew, but they talked together about Linntower.

He asked no embarrassing questions. There was evidently some mystery about the mother, who had died young, and whose death had completely broken her husband's spirit. Redfern had never been the same man afterwards. He never mentioned her name even to his daughter, and Aggy seldom spoke of her—never without tears.

It was a great pleasure to Ellen to speak unrestrainedly, for the first time, of the dead mother respecting whom she knew so little, when she found, or believed that she had found, a person worthy of trust, and whom it did not distress to name her.

She liked to hear the place described where her father had lived in

youth, and which bore the dates of old letters and of many of the gifts which now adorned her humble home. She fancied that it must have been her mother's birthplace. The family name of his lordship was the same as that borne by her own parent before her marriage. Probably she was one of the same kith and kin in some remote degree. The strong ideas of clanship nourished in Scotland made her understand this tie, which might be distinct, but in the North country was always respected. She was certainly of gentle birth, like her father, and had been delicately nurtured. Aggy always said that the pain of leaving Linntower and the travelling about had been too much for her young mistress. She was not well fitted to endure privation.

The cold blast of poverty swept over and blighted her like the spring flowers in the easterly wind, or the bright autumn leaves and lingering flowers,

“ When falls the frost from the clear, cold heaven,
As falls the plague on men,
And the beauty of their smile is gone
From upland, glade, and glen.”

Aggy shook her head as she watched from the window of her kitchen the departure of the dogcart ; but Ellen stood, bareheaded, in the porch, with her eyes shaded by her hand from the sun, as the young Englishman waved his last good-bye.

Then she went back sadly into the sitting-room and put everything in order, replacing the books he had taken down from the case.

She missed, immediately, the little volume belonging to her mother, and sought for it vainly. It was nowhere to be found. Then she fancied that Aggy might have removed it, as she was always very particular about anything which had belonged to her former mistress.

Ellen was on her way to the kitchen to ask her, but she changed her mind and went back to the parlour. If Aggy had taken it out of the stranger's way, she would be sure to replace it—if not—Ellen paused, and stood leaning her head against the bookcase.

If not—*he* must have taken it—and she knew how severe would be Aggy's censure. She did not wish to hear him blamed, so, though days passed and the book was not put back in its place, Ellen said nothing about its disappearance to her mother's faithful servant.

The last traces of the snowstorm vanished from the braes and from the moor—only a wreath or two still hung above their purple sides on the highest peaks of the mountains.

IV.

LINNTOWER had been one of those old Border fortresses which can be turned into comfortable dwellings without destroying their picturesque antiquity. It stood, as its name denoted, by the side of a deep, dark pool, through which flowed a beck, or, as it would have been called on the Scottish side of the Cheviots, a burn. When flooded by autumn tempests it became a torrent and wrought much mischief.

The Squires of Linntower were said to be like their own quickly-swelling water-course. They were choleric men, and in their passion often harmed themselves and others.

The present owner of the Tower, though an old man, had not, even now, conquered his stormy temper; but of late it had sunk into querulousness. A long series of misfortunes had damped his furious passions, but they still smouldered, and if a spark were applied the flame kindled again.

There were dark tales told about Lord Linntower, and he was shunned by his neighbours. Even when a kindly visitor tried to cheer him, the attempt was churlishly repulsed. Many sorrows had fallen upon him; but they had neither chastened his spirits, nor softened his heart.

He was a childless man now, though he had been the father of three promising sons whom he had first estranged from him and finally lost. They all had the Lynn temper, it was true, but they were fine, bold youths; in them, at an early age it might have been corrected.

But theirs was a nature more easy to break than bend. Their father, from whom it was inherited, ruled them with a rod of iron. When they grew older, after divers escapades which were fiercely put down, he laid a yet heavier yoke on their necks; and they one and all defied him.

The eldest married in opposition to his will, emigrated, and died miserably of fever and ague in a swamp to which a deceitful announcement of the flourishing prospects of a rising colony had lured him. His young wife and child followed him to the grave.

The second son ran away from school, and, sooner than return home, went abroad and entered a foreign university, where he was killed in a students' brawl while chivalrously taking the part of a friend less strong and active than himself.

Thwarted in love, and sorely restricted in money matters, the third son fell into a bad circle of acquaintances, and died early, a victim to his own folly and his father's unrelenting severity.

One daughter had been given to him—but over her fate hung a veil of mystery. Her name had not been breathed at Linntower, except in a whisper, for years. It was said in the neighbourhood

that she had angered her father by an attachment to one who, though well-born and well-educated, was beneath her in station.

In one of his fits of ungovernable fury, the old man was said even to have raised his hand against her. There was a stain of ink on one of the family pictures in the library, which the housekeeper declared to be as indelible as the traditional bloodstains on the floor at Holyrood.

Lord Linntower always sat with his back turned to it, and yet, unseen, it bore witness against him that he had hurled the great glass ink-filled globe at the fragile girl who dared to stand up and not only refuse the brilliant match pressed upon her, but to own that she loved one whom her father regarded with scorn and stigmatised as a dependent.

That night Rosamond Lynn fled from her home. She never entered it again, and she was never forgiven or heard of again in the English border-land.

A faint rumour reached some of her early friends some years afterwards that she had died far from home, broken-hearted by her father's unkindness; totally disregarded by him, though more than once she had dutifully sued for pardon.

Now, though no one knew it, his conscience was more tender, especially when anything recalled her image. The old man would sit alone for hours, with his head resting on his hands, beside his desolate hearth, driving away all consolers by his harsh cynical bursts of ill-temper, and weep for his *Rosa Mundi*, as he used to call her when she was a little child—his *Rose of the World*!

In his earlier life he had had one soothing influence—a great love for flowers—but this too was turned to bitterness when the girl he loved better than anything else on earth deserted him, and married, in almost frantic fear and haste, the man who had helped him to lay out the gardens which were the boast of his vain heart.

Even his flowers seemed only to raise evil and covetous feelings from that day. He would have the best of every kind, and they must bloom for him alone. He would have liked to extirpate similar productions from his neighbours' borders. What were not used by the gardeners he sternly ordered to be burned or thrown away.

Redfern, he well knew, was a man descended from a good line of Scottish ancestors, and better educated than himself, but, if he ever spoke of him after discovering his daughter's infatuation, which was but seldom, he called him that gardener—that Scotch fellow that laid out the new pleasure grounds. No Percy was ever more hostile to the Douglas in the old Border raids in which his ancestors had gloried.

There was no question now of Border feuds or even of domestic estrangements. The old lord was his own chief tormentor, and the fire within him burned low. He had ceased to be a terror to his

servants, as, for a time, in the bitterness of disappointments and solitude, he had been. He was even grateful for their respectful demonstrations, thankful not to be left entirely alone.

Lord Linntower raised his bowed head when he heard, unexpectedly, the sounds of an arrival in the courtyard below the windows of his library.

There had been a heavy fall of snow—then the beck had overflowed its banks as usual; bridges were carried away, fields and roads were inundated, several hundred acres of land hopelessly ruined. Not a soul had come to the house without bringing the news of some fresh disaster. For the last three days he had, however, seen no one but the household servants.

One visitor he had, who never flattered yet seldom irritated him. This was his young cousin, Jaspar Lynn, his heir presumptive, though but distantly related to him. He was a fine frank youth, fond of sport, fond of company, high-spirited, like all the men of his race, yet always ready to cheer and soothe his desponding relative, when permitted.

"Is that you, my boy?" said Lord Linntower, faintly, when the door opened and the old butler announced "Mr. Jaspar," and stirred the sluggish fire which his master had nearly allowed to die out.

"Sit down, and give an account of yourself. Not much to say about the fishing in Scotland, I expect, in this fiendish weather?"

"No," said his young cousin, after they had shaken hands cordially, his warm greeting bringing a faint tinge of colour to the ashen cheeks and even a smile to the pale lips of his relative.

"The river was at first too low, and then frozen over. There was not a chance of sport. But I had a better reason for coming back to England—in hurrying here without delay. I am the bearer to you of good tidings."

Lord Linntower raised himself up in his chair and looked sharply at his cousin; then he laughed bitterly, and said:

"I do not well see how that can be—there are few things now that give me any pleasure—but stay—yes—I am glad to see you—I think you have some kind feelings for me. I have outlived friendship in most quarters. You have brought me *yourself*, Jaspar, and for that I thank you."

There was a courtesy—when he did unbend, when he chose to be gracious—in the old nobleman's manner which was very winning. Jaspar acknowledged it by a glance of genuine affection.

"You have had snow here, and the breaking up of the frost has made the beck overflow, but it can have been nothing to the white mass on the moor in which I was well-nigh buried," said Jaspar Lynn, somewhat embarrassed how to begin the tale he had to tell. He paused, and then went on:

"You were very near losing your unworthy heir and representative last week, I assure you. If a girl and a brown retriever had not

pulled me from under a snowdrift where I had passed the night far from comfortably, you would now be the last of the Lynns of Linntower."

"Are you going to marry her? A woman is sure to be at the bottom of all mischief, whether it be a snowdrift or a quarrel," said the old man, smiling somewhat grimly; then added gently:

"Never mind, I have done with interfering. You can bring this fine-grown, bare-footed Hieland lassie to Linntower whenever you like. I shall make no moan about the *mésalliance*. You shall have your own way. You will have it, as I know to my misfortune."

"There is no question of love or marriage," said the young man, though he coloured suspiciously. "The question is not for, but against, my own interests. Do you remember telling me, when you were so ill last Christmas—when you thought that you were dying—that you had made me, unconditionally, your heir; but that you hoped I would do justice to the child of one whom you had injured, if I ever found that she had left any living offspring? It is in your power to amend that wrong yourself."

Linntower sprang up from his chair. "You have unearthed that miscreant, Redfern?" he exclaimed, the old fury blazing in his eyes. "That Highland reever who robbed me of my child! Where is he? Let me see him before I die!"

"No!" said Jaspar, gravely. "Alexander Redfern is beyond your reach. He and your poor daughter are in their graves. But they left a daughter, and I owe my life to her. I am, after her, your next of kin, and she cannot, as a woman, inherit your title or this old house and the estate attached to it; but you can leave the rest of your property to your grandchild—Ellen Redfern."

He took from the pocket of his vest the little book which he had brought away from the cottage on the moor, and put it into the old man's shaking hand.

Lord Linntower read the inscription on the fly-leaf through tears such as he had not shed for years. Before him, as he traced the faded characters, seemed to rise the slight form of the girl he had insulted in that very room.

"Tell her"—he said hoarsely—"Tell my poor Rosamond's daughter that before I see her here she must take the name of Lynn."

The snow had melted on the moor, and the cottage garden was gay with spring blossoms expanding in the April sunshine. Ellen Redfern and Aggy Mervyn were busy tending the borders, propping up plants broken by the storm wind, or weighed down by the snow.

Multitudes of primroses were studding the banks and braes; the cuckoo had been heard sending the news that spring was come through brake and thicket. The burn flowed merrily, singing as it went, past flowery nooks and grassy corners.

The girl's heart was not quite in tune with the prevailing note of gladness. When Aggy went indoors to prepare the dinner, she left off work and stood leaning over the gate, looking towards the mountains, which were still crowned with snow.

Suddenly the silence which had followed the cuckoo's call was broken by the glad bark of a dog, and Hector sprang into sight from behind a clump of alders.

Ellen shaded her eyes with her hand and looked across the moor; when she saw, presently, emerge from the trees, the figures of a man and a little dog advancing towards her. She opened the gate of the cottage garden and went unhesitatingly to meet them.

Sunshine illuminated two happy faces and fell all around that happy group, as she and Jaspar Lynn clasped hands and turned back together. He did not need her support now, but drew her hand tenderly through his arm.

"Ellen," he said, gravely, "I have found out who your mother was, and that we are of kin to each other. I suspected it before, and now your grandfather, Lord Linntower, knows of your existence and longs to welcome you to his home. He has been sorely to blame—but he is old—I fear, dying. The excitement has been too great for him. You must come to him at once, and, as your father and mother's representative, forgive all his hard-heartedness to them—his long neglect of your claims on his affection. Can you do this?"

"Can I forgive a dying man?" exclaimed the girl, fervently. "My own dear mother's father! How else could I ever hope for forgiveness myself? Take me to him at once."

"But there is one condition, dearest," said Jaspar, tenderly. "Before he receives you as his child, his heiress, you must resign your father's name. Lord Linntower wishes to take you to his heart as his own grandchild—and you must bear the old name—the name of Lynn. Ellen, I have thought of a way; I have so arranged—if you will consent to my wish—that this may be no reproach to your honoured parent's memory. You must enter his presence as my wife. Then you will indeed be Ellen Lynn!"

The girl's head drooped, but she did not draw herself away from him. Her mission was found, and she undertook it cheerfully.

Ellen stooped kindly to pick up the little dog, which was pulling at her skirt, tired with his long walk across the moor. Hector had run on in front and was standing in the porch, with Aggy patting his head, while she looked anxiously at her young mistress.

Though the old nobleman did not die then, or for many a year, there was peace in the dwelling of the Lynns of Linntower from the day when Jaspar brought his bonnie bride across the border.

NOTES OF A DISTRICT VISITOR.

SPEAKING of the advantages of living in London, Boswell instances the freedom from remark and petty censure which is there attainable, and which to those who know the teasing restraints of a narrow circle must appear so desirable. Mr. Burke, whose life was such as to make the eye of observation less to be dreaded of him than of most men, once pleasantly remarked, that though he had the honour to represent Bristol, he would not like to live there. "I should be obliged to be so much upon my good behaviour," he said.

Especially is this true with regard to the poor, as for convenience we will call them.

Living so much at their doors, as they do, not the doings of our most public characters are more open to inspection; and many a peccadillo which the perpetrator may fondly deem concealed in the recesses of his own domicile is proclaimed, if not on the house-tops, at the street corners. Their black sheep are very soon spotted out. To this fact is due, in a great measure, the frequent flittings that take place amongst them, fresh surroundings becoming desirable when the old have grown too hot. "If I so much as sing, the neighbours say I've taken too much," complained an aggrieved housewife, "and I only take a glass of beer with my husband at supper—and such I shall *never* do," she added, with an air of the utmost determination.

Sobriety may almost be said to be with them the test of worth.

A man may have the worst of tempers, and be addicted to striking his wife and children; yet, provided he be not wanting in steadiness, the neighbours, if not the wife herself, will speak of him with a certain respect, as "a good, sober man." Another may be the tenderest of husbands and fathers, yet meet with scant appreciation if he fail in that essential virtue of a bread-winner.

For this is what the husband in these ranks most emphatically may be styled. And it is partly on this account that his health and comfort is made a subject of particular consideration, the same principle ruling here as that which induces the Russian peasant priest to cherish his better-half, on whose life his tenure of office depends. "My word, I've *got* to be careful! We couldn't spare him yet, with the children so young, and all," was the unexpected response of a wife on being commended for the admirable devotion with which she had nursed her good man through a trying illness.

This matter-of-fact view of things is very characteristic of the poor. A young woman having come from a distance to visit her dying brother, his wife half-grudgingly remarked that it was "another mouth

for her to feed." And who could blame her, when the filling of each mouth in the poverty-stricken household was a matter involving hard labour and anxious thought?

Another woman, an affectionate wife in her way, would throw cold water on her visitor's sensibilities by her practical manner of advert-
ing to the chance of her husband's decease and to her own contingent resources, her formula for the contemplated event being the same as that adopted in higher circles. "If anything happens to Smithers," she would say, with an air of resignation it might have depressed the honest fellow to perceive, "I'll go into service as a cook." It is in blunter terms that some of them will refer to a like possibility. A childless woman, expressing a regret that she had not at least a little girl, remarked that the child would have been company for her "when the master was snapped away;" the probability of her being the first to go apparently not having occurred to her.

The poor are almost invariably pessimists where sickness is concerned. A fatal conclusion is at once leaped at, and the atmosphere of the churchyard allowed to penetrate into the sick-chamber. As soon as graver symptoms show themselves, the patient is pronounced to be "dying." The change of medicine prescribed by the doctor in charge is descanted on with ominous solemnity, and the bottle handed about to be sniffed at by the attendant company.

They seldom have any fear of death, committing themselves trustfully to the arms of Divine mercy when life appears to be slipping from them. And there is something almost ludicrous, for all its pathos, in the way they lay claim, for themselves and their departed friends, to whatever joys may be reserved for the people of God. Thoroughly penetrated with the spirit of the "Old Hundredth," they assume themselves to be all His people and the sheep of His hand, seeing it is He that hath made us and not we ourselves.

Some of their spiritual directors do not scruple, even at a death-bed, to disturb this feeling of confidence, which they term self-righteousness. We have heard a pious lady relate, with much gusto, how she terrified an old woman, said to be dying, by telling her at the close of a short interview, "Well, granny, you're going to ——" (mentioning a place which in our revised Bible is designated as Sheol), leaving the helpless old creature trembling so violently that the bed shook beneath her. Her only grounds for this conclusion were that "granny" seemed to be deriving some comfort from the acknowledged fact, to which all her neighbours testified, that she had been "a good liver," as they phrase it, and had honestly fulfilled her duties as wife and mother.

Their generally childlike faith in things unseen is indeed one of the few compensations of the poor for their lack of worldly prosperity, enabling them to bear the greatest sufferings with fortitude.

They will speak as familiarly, for the most part, of their Heavenly as of their earthly father, and with the same simplicity of affection.

Touching is the freedom with which the very shabbiest old crone, who would consider herself as beneath the notice of her fellow-mortals, will refer to the Deity. "He does the best He can for us!" one such aged creature, infirm with rheumatism and beset by the most sordid cares of poverty, declared, with an affecting, because so genuine, expression of confidence in at least the goodwill of her Maker. While another, who had just sustained the greatest loss with which a poor woman can be afflicted, in the death of her husband, broke forth, as she wiped the tears from her faded blue eyes—"His will must be done—and He's welcome! I'm sure He's welcome!"—as if with a misgiving lest the involuntary display of her grief might have wounded the feelings of the Almighty.

A younger woman, commenting on a series of calamities in the shape of illness, poverty and accidents, which, for some years past, had persistently distressed the community, burst out with the half expostulatory, half deprecating reflection, "We must be very bad for Him to treat us like this"—as if, while wondering at His judgments, she was yet unwilling to cast the shadow of an aspersion on His justice.

The ignorance of many concerning the Bible is astonishing. Not only do its most important stories come as a perfect surprise upon them, but, their spiritual faculties being dormant, its symbolism presents often nothing but material images of terror to their minds. A young woman, after listening with rapt attention to a chapter from the book of Revelation, horrified her teacher by declaring that she would not like to go to Heaven, and, being pressed for a reason, "Because of them beasts," was her startling reply.

Some appear to consider all the events recorded in Holy Writ as having taken place in a different sphere. The earthly Jerusalem is inevitably mixed up in their ideas with its heavenly prototype. Palestine is confounded with Paradise, and whatever localities they may remember as mentioned in the Scriptures, are, in their ideas, quite without the pale of mundane geography. A woman, on hearing that a gentleman she knew of had started for Egypt, exclaimed in the utmost bewilderment, "I thought Egypt was in the other world!"

The women are too much engrossed, as a rule, with household cares to give much heed to literature, as such; yet their thoughts occasionally stray in its direction. The latent impulse in them is likely to be excited by those narrative tracts bearing on their own manner of life, concerning which they know so much more themselves than any outsider can possibly do, that, in the moment of reading, it seems to them as if it might be an easy thing to present their experiences in like form.

"I often think I should like to write something," said one poor woman; "and there's only *one* thing that stops me—and that is want of time," she added, hastily, as if in fear we might misapprehend her

meaning. On a question as to what her theme would be, "I should write something about real life, such as, *On the Trials of a Mother*," she answered, gazing dreamily out into the little street where her two young hopefuls were rolling together in the mud. And, with a sigh over her wasted abilities, she resumed her ironing.

Their romantic tendency is sometimes shown in the names they give their children, though the good old nomenclature is followed in the main. But with the sturdy dame in Crabbe's "Parish Register," whose pride took fire at the mildly-spoken query, "Why *Lonicera* wilt thou name thy child?" they might reply, "We have a right."

A woman was much hurt at the vicar stumbling over the string of names she had chosen to bestow on her latest born, and which bore all the impress of having been invented for the occasion. On our asking the name of a little snub-nosed, sandy-haired maiden in her mother's arms, "*Ady*," was the complacent answer. *Ada* being a favourite appellation in our parish, we took for granted this was meant; but our supposition had fallen a flight below the mark. "I said *Ady*—not *Ada*. Have you ever read *Don Jooan*? It was her father chose the name." And she admiringly regarded the unconscious little namesake of the beauteous *Haidée*. Byron, we may remark, whatever his present standing in the world of criticism may be, certainly holds his own amongst the working classes. His name, and never without the lordly prefix, is the first that rises to their lips in connection with poetry; and we have seen "*Don Juan*," in particular, on the table of more than one cottage parlour.

No small amount of artistic taste and talent exists amongst the poor. Anything that appeals to their instinctive love of beauty, a bunch of flowers, a strain of music however simple, a beautiful sunset, a rainbow, will divert them from their monotonous cares; and many women, especially those who have no children to monopolise their attention, will cherish a window-plant as if it were a thing of life.

There is a growing desire that at least the rising generation should acquire some practical acquaintance with drawing and music. Concertinas and other small instruments are frequently to be found in cottage homes; and a piano, going off at a bargain, is in great request. Little fingers born to labour are often very much at home upon the keyboard; and even those already hardened by years of toil will turn, when opportunity offers, to the ivory notes, the sounds evoked, however elementary, apparently responding to some craving in their nature. We have known a young policeman spend most of his leisure time in this manner, trying, though sorely hampered by the size of his fingers, to awaken echoes of music-hall and other popular strains on his landlady's old piano, and gratefully availing himself of the slightest hint toward the attainment of his ambition.

The notion prevails to a certain extent amongst the men that to do anything in the way of housework would be derogatory to their

dignity, even though they may have been trained to it in early life by their mothers.

"I didn't sign articles to wait upon my wife when I married," proclaimed a strapping boatman; the fragile little skeleton of a woman who stood in that relation to him being far on in consumption. In accordance with these heroic sentiments, he would not so much as pour himself out a cup of tea when the weary housekeeper, having left everything prepared and ready to his hand, had toiled upstairs, perhaps, to attend on a sick child. A magnanimous ignorance on domestic affairs is occasionally affected by heroes of this ilk; another of whom, with an air of proud complacency, remarked in our hearing, probably with a view of awaking our admiration, that he could no more infuse tea than he could infuse himself.

Sometimes it is really the ability that is wanting and not the will. "I've done the best I could, but I'm only a man," said one, who, during the absence of his women-folk, was obliged to get tea ready for some unexpected visitors, and light a fire in the parlour.

There is nothing, on the other hand, that some are incapable of accomplishing, from taking womanly charge of their children, left motherless, to mending or making furniture, and renovating a dilapidated house from top to bottom. Veritable Robinson Crusoes in their way, with perhaps more than the stimulus of living on a desert island to inspire them.

It is, with all its anxieties, a happy-go-lucky sort of existence that the majority of these poor people lead, living for the most part up to their income, which is often larger than that of many a professional man.

"My chap gets more than that!" one slatternly woman half contemptuously remarked, referring to her vicar's stipend; "a good bit more," she added, after a moment's silent consideration of the subject. Being put to comparatively slight outlay in a number of ways which bear heavily on the class above them, they can devote their earnings chiefly to the inner man; and it is only in cases of dire poverty that any stint in food or fuel will be submitted to. Not a few of them, indeed, would invest their last shilling on a meal, trusting to Providence for the next; though the unpretending fortitude and patience with which they accommodate themselves to radically altered circumstances is very touching.

Most of them will endure the extremest privations rather than resort to their last refuge, the workhouse, or the "House," as with bated breath they call it. Even when every avenue of hope seems to be closed, and the last resources are at an end, they will put off the evil hour from day to day, waiting, like Micawber, though with nothing of his easy insouciance, for something to turn up.

We have known old women to pass backwards and forwards between that dread abode and their own miserable quarters, to which they would return again and again, with the renewed hope of being

able to fight the battle of life in their own free if wretched makeshift way, to be driven back beaten to the great unhomely shelter whose doors are always open to such as them.

One such aged creature, "far on in her eighties," as the neighbours averred, and whose home was made unbearable to her by her daughter's drunken habits, pursued these forlorn tactics for years, finding it hard to decide betwixt her choice of evils which was worst. When things became too bad at home, she would screw up her courage to enter the House, returning very soon, however, and with ghastly tales of the treatment to which she and the other "pore old ladies" (her room-mates) had been subjected. One of these she solemnly declared to have died, owing to the roughness of a nurse; and, while her colour rose, as if at the recollection of things too horrible to mention—"Oh, they use you shameful, my dear!" was the phrase her pent-up misery found vent in. Then, cooling down, she would descant on the wretched victuals served out, and of which she could barely bring herself to swallow "a mossel," while the "taw-watter," when they got it, was fit to make one "heave one's heart up."

Many of the women are as dependent on their medical man as the finest delicate lady in Mayfair. But hospital treatment is regarded with distrust, the fancy prevailing, as an old woman rather aptly phrased it, that the young doctors are given to trying their "experiences" on patients. Mrs. Malaprop may be dying out in the middle classes, but she is rampant in these. We have heard of a woman who announced that she had been "insulting her physician, and he had given her a subscription and said she had a festival in her inside." Whatever the festival may have been, she evidently thought it conferred some sort of subtle distinction upon her.

An Englishman's house is said to be his castle, but it is less so in the poor man's case. What with the School Board, the Board of Health officers, district visitors of the more intrusive kind, and others, our labouring classes certainly have a taste of paternal government.

In times of infectious illness they are especially subject to supervision, the most stringent obligations being insisted on with regard to them. To evade these they not infrequently attempt to disguise the fact of such illness having broken out in their homes.

Grievous mistakes, however, are occasionally made upon the other side. A woman of our acquaintance, who, during a slight epidemic of small-pox, was supposed to have shown symptoms of the malady, was called for one night by emissaries from the hospital, and would have been straightway carried thither *volens nolens* in a conveyance brought for the purpose. But she proved equal to the emergency. Barricading the door with the assistance of her aged mother, the only person with her in the house (her husband being at sea), she courageously kept the foe at bay, and the hospital was disappointed of its intended patient. Following up her victory, early next morning she went to a well-known doctor in the town, and obtained from

him a certificate to the effect that she was suffering from nothing more serious than a feverish cold.

The working-classes being untrammelled by any regular code of etiquette, a peculiarly ingenuous display of natural quality may consequently be looked for amongst them, and visiting in their midst affords the student of character wide scope for the indulgence of his hobby.

One man, out of his natural courtesy, will offer his visitor the best chair in the room. Another may think it more consistent with his dignity, as master of the house, to reserve the post of honour for himself. But it is with the woman-kind that the visitor has most to do. Some guard their thresholds as jealously as if they fancied one to be of the nature of an evil spirit, whose entrance might bring ill-luck upon the dwelling.

A woman who had taken many months to make up her mind to the venture admitted us one afternoon into the sanctity of her parlour with the courteously-intended word of welcome as she handed us a chair—"This is the first time as hever you've 'ad the pleasure of sitting down in my 'ouse."

Some, in the spirit of the wandering Arab, will not be satisfied until the visitor has eaten of their bread, while there are others who apparently deem it beneath either their own dignity, or yours, to take the possibility of such a thing into consideration. "Me and this other lady is having a cup of afternoon tea," an old friend of ours would pleasantly remark if ever we chanced to come upon her during the entertainment; the thought of inviting us to share in it being the last that would have suggested itself to her mind.

There is one class of people that is very seldom met with amongst the poor in their own abodes. There are the aged grand-parents, the parents themselves, the exhaustless relays of little ones, the numerous married aunts and uncles, cousins, and other relatives; and amongst all these we have come across but one old maid.

A gentle, prim little soul she was, and kept house for a hard-working charwoman, whose sons and herself were out working most of the day. She attributed her condition of single blessedness to her own shyness, declaring that she might have married "many a time." According to the tradition of her order, she cherished the portrait of the lover of her youth, who had gone down with his ship to the bottom of the sea some forty years ago; for this was an old maid indeed. Women of these ranks are often as little inclined as their richer sisters to forego the prestige of their youth, and marriages amongst them at an advanced age are by no means infrequent. These usually take place from houses where they have lived in service, the elderly couple settling down as unobtrusively as possible to their untried life.

Good and kind to his family as the working-man generally appears, he is most emphatically master in his own house, and few are the

wives who venture to dispute the supremacy. Should they do so, an encounter is apt to ensue, from which the man, however, occasionally comes off second best. "Me and my 'usband was 'aving some words," was the polite formula with which one sturdy virago would allude to these little altercations, the words in this case being staves, or, to be more liberal, the staircase banisters, which, from the ever-renewed demand upon them, rapidly disappeared till there was scarcely one left.

Nothing are the women more ashamed of than a black eye, inventing the most elaborate excuses to account for one. A friend of ours who had struck against a door on a dark night, and whose face bore evident trace of the accident, was regarded with an air of much commiseration by a woman in her district. Utterly ignoring her visitor's explanation of the matter, "I can't think," burst forth the sympathetic soul, "how some people can bear to be knocked about. If my husband was to give me so much as a cross look it would kill me."

Some of the less high-minded among them enjoy being asked, with more or less circumlocution, according to one's own sense of delicacy, how "the master" is behaving himself. "I'm sorry to say he's only *very, very* middling," is a common form for the expression of their opinion concerning him.

Children are objects of love and praise in cottage homes, as they are everywhere else; but they often have to suffer from their parents' ignorance. Spinal complaint is sometimes induced by the way in which, from the age of a few weeks, they are held in an upright position.

Many seem to consider their little ones impervious to cold, standing with them at their street doors in the bleakest winter wind. We have seen this done in the case of a child ill with whooping-cough or influenza, its little eyes inflamed and watery, and its face blue from the exposure. On our expressing compassion for a baby whose tiny arm was sore and raw from vaccination, the youthful mother informed us with an air of authority that so young an infant could not feel pain. "They are little angels," she placidly explained; "they cannot suffer, they are too innocent." And several neighbours present corroborated the notion. At what age the curse of suffering humanity may begin to be felt is probably a doubtful matter.

A more dangerous opinion is that young infants require no air. They will often be tightly wrapped in shawls, with not a loop-hole left to breathe through. On our remonstrance, a woman drew down the heavy covering from her sleeping baby, revealing a little face of death-like hue.

Perhaps no less injurious in its general effect is the habit of incessant, violent rocking of the cradle which almost universally prevails. If the mother is busy, an elder child, perhaps barely out of the cradle itself, will be set to the task. The louder baby screams, the rougher becomes the rocking, till, dizzied perhaps by the un-

ceasing motion, the helpless little creature holds its peace. And the wisest in other respects are as great offenders in this as any.

The grades of social distinction are by no means ignored amongst the working classes. "Two-pence-halfpenny looks down on two-pence," as a Devonshire woman neatly phrased it, she herself as keeper of a small grocer's shop being above such petty differences.

The policeman and his family occupy an assured position, safe from the down-hills of fortune as represented in the loss of work. Yet it is a delicate and ticklish one; and if he resides in a rowdy neighbourhood he is apt to make enemies, his consort sharing in the obloquy cast upon him. One woman, a model of respectability and virtue, was much hurt by a neighbour who, in retaliation of some interference she had met with from the representative of order, called out in shrill, offensive tones that all might hear—"Hark to the common policeman!"

The distinctions we speak of are, however, very superficial, a strong bond of brotherhood existing amongst the people. It frequently happens, moreover, that a skilled artisan will be obliged, when work in his own line is unobtainable, to "go labouring."

There is a growing tendency amongst working people to assume an equality with the classes they used to consider as on a perfectly different level from their own. The younger generation have acquired an independence of bearing not often found amongst their elders. "I can't get them to say ma'am," the toil-worn mothers will protest, with a touch of admiring envy in their reproof. And a woman, excusing her husband who had lost his situation through some dispute with his employers, remarked, "He can't be going about *sirring*." The American tone of equality is certainly developing, and there will probably be less class difference in the next generation than there is now.

The life of toil and suffering develops many noble traits.

Sympathy, generosity and unselfish consideration are rife amongst the poor. It is to such as are but little better off than themselves that those in want will turn, and seldom in vain. Women will give up their most valued possessions to be pawned by an acquaintance in difficulties. We have known one devote her husband's silver medal to that purpose, and another her son's best coat. And many will forego just claims upon a struggling family. Men engaged at the same works will get up collections amongst themselves to relieve the necessities of a mate. And few are the women who would refuse to rise at any hour of the night at the call of illness in a neighbour's house.

The word neighbour has indeed a closer signification in these ranks than perhaps in any other. It is a common thing for those who live next door to each other to summon assistance in an emergency by rapping against the wall of partition between their several houses.

Their sense of justice, too, is almost always to be relied on. The failings of one member of a family do not usually entail reproach on the rest; and whenever a notoriously bad character turns over a new leaf, those residing near will begin to speak of him or her as a "good, quiet neighbour," against whom they have nothing to say.

The purlieus of the poor are more frequented than richer neighbourhoods by beggars, street-singers, and itinerant musicians and vendors, who have no doubt learned by experience that it is from those out of whose ranks they have probably fallen that they are most likely to meet with consideration, if not help. One is reminded of the fashion in such matters said to prevail in Spain by the manner in which charity is tendered or else refused these suppliants. "I have nothing for you to-day, master." Or—"If you will accept a little bread-and-butter, you are welcome to it." Rarely are child-mendicants sent empty away, some kind-hearted woman being sure to reflect on what her feelings would be should her own little ones be compelled to go a-begging for a bit of bread.

When we recall the pleasant hours we have spent amongst the poor, the genuine goodness of so many of them, their courteous hospitality, their gentle care and training of the little ones, their noble reticence with regard to their own difficulties and trials, their peaceful faith and trust flowing undisturbed in quiet havens of their own, while the wild seas of doubt and speculation sweep unnoticed by; when we recall this, and their unobtrusive kindness, their touching gratitude for the slightest kindness shown to them, we feel that it is an impertinence to speak of them as if they were in any way beneath us.

P. W. ROOSE.



GRANDMOTHER'S CLOTHES' BASKET.

THERE had been terrible battles, and Winifred would not give in ; so grandmother, who was guardian to the refractory girl, ordered her to her room until a proper state of mind was reached. Now Winnie and I were cousins and both of us orphans ; and grandmother was of the old school, hard and tyrannical. She wanted Winnie to marry an elderly man who had gout, a detestable temper and a huge rent-roll. But sweet, bright Winnie ! since she was a child she had loved Ronald Leigh, and now he was first lieutenant in the Navy, and had asked her for his wife.

"Presumptuous folly !" cried our sage grandmother ; "the child shall not throw herself away." And so bolts and bars were set to keep love out, but when did that avail ?

Winnie had been a prisoner for a week, shut in her room ; and at the first her eyes were heavy with tears. But on Saturday—I remember it was just after the laundress's large covered basket of clothes was carried upstairs—she was flushed and smiling. I thought it strange when I conveyed my grandmother's nightly message, "Are you prepared to submit ?" which I had hard work at all times to deliver formally for laughter, to find the captive looking so like her old, bright self, but she only kissed me, and whispered back her usual answer of "No !" in a rather more defiant tone than usual.

All the next day, Sunday, was gloomy and dull. The stately meals with my grandmother were rendered more trying than ordinary by the absence of that bright-faced cousin, whose merry blue eyes had lightened up the sober room with many a furtive gleam of fun. On Monday I was sent up to my usual duty of watching the counting of the linen for the wash. I wrote the list while Joan, the old housemaid, separated and called out the number of the things. The linen room opened out of Winnie's, and as I passed back to go downstairs, I paused to throw my arm round the dear neck with a whispered question.

"Have you any comfort, Winnie, darling ?"

"Stay a minute, Gladys," she answered hurriedly—and old Joan drew near anxiously. "Joan knows," she went on. "I mustn't tell *you*, Gladys, for your own sake, but all will be right by to-morrow."

She spoke as if she meant it. Just then grandmother called me, and, much puzzled, I ran down. It was to accompany her in a long, tedious stroll round the square.

I was not allowed to go up to Winnie again, and in the evening we sat down to our solitary dinner. While eating the soup, wheels were heard to dash up and stop at the door, and the bell rang loudly.

"What is that, Judkins?" inquired grandmother, turning her stern face on the butler.

"Laundress, I think, my lady; 'twas the area bell," answered the old man; and after having put the fish on the table, he vanished from the room.

Grandmother did not help the fish; she never seemed to see the fine turbot that lay so temptingly on the dish. With a nervous manner, not usual, she rose from her chair, walked to the window, and peered out. Instinctively I followed her and coincided in her verdict as she dropped the blind and shut out the lamp-lit square.

"Only the laundress."

I wondered what else she could have thought. And where was Judkins? Heavy steps sounded on the stairs, and grandmother opened the dining-room door just as the big square basket was being carried down to the hall by Judkins and Joan. Sharply the old lady's voice rose.

"What do you mean by this, Judkins? Why do you leave the dining-room? The maids could have carried that down!"

"Seems 'eavier than usual, my lady," said Judkins imperturbably.

"That it do!" cried Joan gaspingly; "two men wouldn't be too much for it!"

And out to the cart went the basket through the hall-door as being the readiest way. The door shut with a snap, and Judkins came in rubbing his hands and smiling. The solemn, decorous Judkins!

And we heard the cart dash and clatter away.

Grandmother never looked at Judkins; she was too angry. She helped me to cold fish, and then herself; and so on over the remainder of that wearisome dinner; it seemed to be longer than ever. At last I ventured to look round at the clock—it was nine, and we had sat down at half-past six!—that was a very late hour for dinner when I was a girl, my dear.

"Go up once more to your cousin, Gladys, and ask if she is prepared to submit."

Solemnly I rose from my chair, left the room, and closed the door after me. At the back of the hall stood Judkins and Joan, whispering with some of the other servants. I thought it strange, but they all dispersed as my white dress emerged from the dining-room. I walked slowly up the stairs until I came to the little chamber where the prisoner was kept locked up, and at it I knocked. No answer; so I turned the key, which was in the door, and went in. The room was in hopeless confusion, and no Winifred Lacy was there! Tremblingly I looked around at the scattered ornaments and ribbons, torn letters, and other *débris* of hasty departure, and when old Joan entered behind me, I threw myself into her arms and cried aloud with terror.

"Joan, Joan, where is she? What is it all? Oh, my darling Winnie!"

The old woman soothed me like a child, and whispered:

"All is well with her, dear missy—only nobody must say much."

"Has she gone away, Joan? Who let her out?—and how shall I tell grandmother?"

There was no need. Grandmother, white and stern, stood at the door. It was well for me that I had no hand in the escape.

Next day a letter came to say Winnie was Ronald Leigh's wife. Grandmother wished she had shut up *both*.

And long after—when I was a wife and mother myself, and had inherited all my grandmother's wealth, left to me in her indignation—I was told that Ronald was the man who drove the laundress's cart that night, and that he had carried off his beautiful bride in "Grandmother's Clothes' Basket!"

MINNIE DOUGLAS.



SONNET.

BELIEVE it not: life is not storm, but peace,
 The peace that comes when storms have died away;
 The calm that crowns some fiery battle day
 By Persian fought on plains of ancient Greece,
 When vanquished sink in death, and conquerors cease
 From weariness to strike; and closes night
 O'er both her dark and drowsy wing—Life's might
 Our conquered passions prove; our soul's release
 From shameful bonds. Say we live when, serene
 We stand upon this sad life's second shore,
 Our youth behind; the flood of time between
 Two lives—then smile at griefs whose sting is o'er,
 At joys that can delude the heart no more,
 And thoughtful dream of passions that have been.

JULIA KAVANAGH.

A SHY AUSTRALIAN.

BY VIRGINIA TAYLOUR.

MRS. OSBORNE, of Balmoral House, Anerley, was giving a dance.

Balmoral House, being a jerry-built suburban villa of the kind advertised by house-agents as "A desirable residence, with two reception-rooms, six bed-rooms and a bath-room," was not eminently adapted for that form of entertainment. But Mrs. Osborne was a woman of determination and resources, and her annual dance was usually, and with reason, considered by all concerned a very successful enterprise. She generally managed to have, not only enough of the male sex, but a good proportion of presentable, full-grown specimens.

To-night, she had achieved an additional triumph. She had secured the presence of her cousin, Viscountess Langholme.

Lady Langholme was a widow with five portionless daughters, for whom it was her main object in life to procure husbands. She went to work in a very business-like manner. She was never seen, even in her own house, with more than two, and rarely with more than one of her girls; and she had a marvellous knack of disposing of them singly during the country-house visiting season with friends who lived far apart and had different circles of acquaintance. But in vain. Frances the eldest was four-and-twenty, and Ada, the youngest, was nineteen, and not one of them had ever had a proposal. The case was becoming so desperate that Lady Langholme had thought even the opportunities offered by a suburban ball might be worth trying for Frances, who could not reasonably be expected to retain her looks much longer, and who must therefore be content with something less than might still be hoped for Ada, who had only had one season, or Nellie, who was a beauty; or, even the twins, who were popular with everybody.

Therefore, here was Lady Langholme, sitting with maternal heroism in a draughty passage, which was the only place afforded by the suburban villa for chaperons, while Mrs. Osborne brought up her "nicest men," one after another, to be introduced to Frances.

Frances Scott was a tall, slender, graceful girl, with grey eyes, a clear, pale skin, soft dark hair, and a touch of proud reserve in her manner, which some people called "high-bred repose," and others, "odious airs." Mrs. Osborne's "nicest men" inclined to the latter opinion, but the few raw youths whom the hostess was obliged to fall back upon to fill up Frances's programme hardly realised the existence of any reserve in her manner.

"I'm quite glad we came," said Lady Langholme, when her daughter was beside her for a few minutes. "It is all very nice and very amusing."

"I am very glad we came," returned Frances, "for Cousin Laura's sake. It is disgraceful that we should never have had the civility to come before."

"Not dancing, Frances, dear," exclaimed Cousin Laura, coming up at this moment. "Isn't your card full?"

"It is quite full enough," answered Frances brightly. "I can assure you I'm not accustomed to have a partner for every dance."

"Oh, but, my dear, you must. Let me see." Mrs. Osborne stood reflecting, with rather a distressed look. "There's that young Mr. Fanshawe. He's an Australian squatter or something; and rich, I believe," she added in an undertone to Lady Langholme.

But Frances caught the words, and her features immediately stiffened.

"Introduce him to us, at any rate," replied Lady Langholme, "and then we can judge for ourselves."

Mrs. Osborne went away and returned in a few minutes with a tall, handsome, athletic-looking young man, with bright, keen blue eyes, a fair beard, and a sunburnt skin.

The introduction was made, the hostess moved away, and Mr. Fanshawe, leaning easily against the doorway of the ball-room, remarked:

"I haven't spoken to a woman for seven years, so I'm rather shy."

"It's as well you inform us of the fact, as we certainly should not have guessed it," replied Lady Langholme.

Frances drew up her head and appeared to be intent on watching the dancers.

"No," returned Mr. Fanshawe, "because you have never seen shyness before as exhibited by a savage."

Lady Langholme laughed, and for a few minutes conversation between the pair flowed brightly. From time to time the young man glanced at Frances's abstracted face, but he made no effort to address her.

"You don't dance, I suppose?" said Lady Langholme, reading these glances with maternal quickness.

"I am sorry to say it is an art I have quite forgotten."

Mr. Osborne approached at this point to take Lady Langholme in to supper. Mr. Fanshawe then offered to conduct the young lady to the supper-room.

"No, thank you," she replied. "I am going to dance immediately."

"But you need not fulfil supper dance engagements if you are hungry."

"Perhaps not in the bush," she retorted, and then checked her-

self, vexed at betraying that she had been listening to his conversation with her mother.

He did not apparently notice either betrayal or vexation. Nor did he urge his previous request. He quietly took Lady Langholme's vacated chair, and fell to talking of books, and music, and pictures as easily as if he had lived all his life in London; but there was a spontaneity and simplicity in all his remarks that differed widely from the conventional superficial art criticism to which Frances was accustomed. She left him, however, with alacrity when her next partner, a most unprepossessing-looking youth of about twenty, came to claim her.

As Lady Langholme and her daughter were leaving that night, Mr. Fanshawe was standing in the hall. The elder lady held out her hand to him.

"Good-night, Mr. Fanshawe. Mind you come and see me."

But Frances gave him only a cold little bow as she passed out.

"Charming person, Lady Langholme," observed Mrs. Osborne to the young man.

"Yes," he replied, "Lady Langholme *is* charming, but the daughter is either very stupid or very stuck up."

"She is not really either," said Mrs. Osborne, "but she has a difficult life with her —" She stopped on the verge of a possibly indiscreet remark, and moved away.

Lady Langholme, in the meantime, was discoursing to her daughter on the agreeable surprise she had experienced at finding that suburban balls were, but for a few minor details, very like the balls of her own set.

"And as for Mr. Fanshawe," concluded her ladyship, "*he* is delightful; so clever and original."

"He struck me as being very self-sufficient," returned Frances; and then she resolutely composed herself for sleep.

But when the carriage drew up at their house in Lower Berkeley Street, Frances had not slept, and whatever she may have done during the night, she rang her bell at eight o'clock the next morning to intimate that she did not desire to lie in bed later than usual.

Her bell was answered by her four sisters coming in in their dressing-gowns, all eager to know the result of the novel and interesting experiment that had been tried the previous night.

"Now tell us all about it," began Nellie, sitting down on the bed, while the twins leant over the foot-rail, and Ada found herself a chair. "We did pity you last night. Were you dreadfully bored?"

"Not more so than usual," replied Frances calmly.

"And did you dance much? And could they dance?" inquired Ada.

"I danced a good deal more than I am in the habit of doing—I was made a great deal of, my dears. And they could dance, taking

them all round, as well as most of the men we are accustomed to dance with."

"And mother," asked one of the twins—"is she horribly disgusted? Or does she think it was worth while?"

"Oh, Dolly, dear," sighed Frances, "I'm sorry to say she does think it was worth while."

"Oh, tell us about it," cried the whole four at once. "Who is it? What sort of man?"

"Well," Frances paused, and turned her face so that it was half buried in the pillow, "he seemed rather a nice sort of man. But of course mother rushed at him, so I was obliged to snub his nose off."

"Frances is blushing," observed Ada. "Oh, dear! What a pity."

And the other three echoed "What a pity!"

Then Nellie went on imploringly, "Oh, Frances! *Don't, don't* be foolish."

"What nonsense you are all talking," cried Frances. "I am going to get up and dress, and you had all better go and dress too."

"But do tell us some more about him," urged Nellie. "Who is he? What is he like? Of course he is eligible, or mother would not have rushed at him."

"There is nothing to tell you," answered Frances impatiently. "He is an Australian who gives himself airs. Mother has asked him here, so then, Nellie, you can marry him. Now please go, all of you."

She jumped out of bed as she spoke, and her sisters reluctantly retired, only, however, to congregate in the twins' room and re-discuss the unusual circumstance of Frances's blushing over one of their mother's eligible young men.

"If Frances likes him he must be nice," they sighed; "and the more she likes him, the more she will snub him, if mother persists in throwing her at his head."

About a week after Mrs. Osborne's dance, Lady Langholme and her eldest daughter on their return from a drive found Mr. Fanshawe's card on the hall-table.

"I am sorry we have missed him," observed Lady Langholme. "I suppose now we must ask him to dinner."

"I don't see the necessity," said Frances.

"Come into my sitting-room for a moment," her mother went on, heedless of this remark; "I will see what days we have free."

Frances obeyed, and stood by the writing-table with an air of serene indifference while her mother looked over her list of engagements.

"Tuesday week will do," Lady Langholme said at last. "We will have a party of eight, and you had better dine—as you know him."

"It's the twins' turn," objected Frances.

"It won't do to have three of ourselves out of eight," returned her mother.

"Then Ada's turn is next."

"Don't be so tiresome, Frances. I wish you to dine."

Frances said no more. Mr. Fanshawe accepted the invitation, and arrived on Tuesday evening exactly as the clock struck eight.

In spite of Frances's previous protests, he was told off to take her down to dinner. As they passed a curtained recess on the landing, Frances was made aware, by a twitch at her dress, that her sisters were concealed there for the purpose of taking a survey of the shy Australian. The circumstance did not incline her to relax the stiffness of her manner to the young man.

He, however, seemed quite unconscious of her coolness.

"I'm awfully glad to have the opportunity of seeing a little of the best London society," he observed, looking round the table. "I've a year to be in England, and I want to see everything."

"The best London society is undoubtedly a sight worth going through much to see," returned Frances, "but I'm afraid if you depend on us for seeing it, you will return to the bush unsatisfied."

He turned his head and looked at her inquiringly.

"Now what do you mean by that?"

"Simply what I say."

"I think you are mistaken," he said, going on with his fish; "Lady Langholme is so very kind, I am sure she will give me some introductions."

Frances smiled rather scornfully.

"You don't understand me," she said. "My mother's introductions won't help you. We ourselves do not belong to the inner circle."

"Oh! No, I didn't understand you. I don't now; at least, not entirely," he added, while a faint smile, indicative of some hidden amusement, flickered around his mouth.

Frances paused a moment as if thinking. Then she said:

"A widow with five portionless daughters is not thought much of in society. Of course we know a good many people and count duchesses and earls amongst our acquaintances—but, still—I should advise you to look higher for introductions."

"Thank you for your advice. I will consider the matter," he answered, and then for some minutes gave all his attention to his left-hand neighbour.

After dinner he did not approach Frances again until he was leaving, when he handed her one of her gloves. "I picked this up in the dining-room," he said; "I think it is yours."

"Thank you, it is," she answered.

"Good-night. Lady Langholme says you are always at home on Fridays."

"It's my mother's day," said Frances indifferently, "but you won't find it at all amusing."

"Thank you," he replied, "for what is, I suppose, meant for more advice."

Frances turned away, and made a mental resolution that Fridays should, in future, find her anywhere but at home.

Therefore when Mr. Fanshawe came on the following Friday he found the daughters of the house represented by Nellie and Ada. He appeared quite satisfied with the exchange, and went away without making the slightest allusion to their elder sister.

"My dear Frances," Nellie exclaimed afterwards, when the sisters were discussing their day's visitors, "he is perfectly charming! And so good-looking."

"The next time he comes," Dolly declared, "Amy and I mean to be to the fore."

"Yes," said Amy; "there's no use leaving the field to Frances, because she refuses to make use of her opportunities."

"My dear girls," said Ada from the writing-table, where she was fastening up a parcel, "I can tell you that he has already fallen in love with Nellie. Frances, dear, lend me your seal ring for a moment."

Frances looked rather discomposed.

"I have lost it," she said.

"Lost it!" they all cried. "Oh, Frances, and you valued it so much. How did you lose it, and when?"

"I missed it about a week ago."

"Why on earth did you never mention it before?"

"Oh, what's the good?"

"We could have helped you to look for it," said Ada, while Nellie glanced curiously at her sister's face.

Time went on, and Mr. Fanshawe became quite an habitué of the house. The four younger daughters flirted audaciously with him in spite of their mother's efforts to prevent their having the opportunity of doing so, while Frances, whom Lady Langholme threw prominently in his way, treated him with the coolest indifference.

He preserved an appearance of equanimity under both varieties of treatment, and was never for a moment thrown off his centre by anything. Nevertheless, the family came gradually to the conclusion that Ada had been right in surmising that he was seriously attracted by Nellie. Now Nellie was in love with an impecunious younger son, whom she never could marry, and this new turn of affairs lent piquancy to the situation. For while Nellie frankly expressed her belief that she had made a conquest of the shy Australian, she declined to say what she meant to do with her captive.

Matters had reached this point when the season drew to a close, and Lady Langholme began to review her prospects for the autumn. She had invitations enough for herself and one daughter to last till

she could return to London. The twins also had been asked to several houses where they were on sufficiently intimate terms to stay for a week or even more. But two of the girls were unprovided with any resources for the months of August and September.

"I don't know how we are to manage," sighed Lady Langholme.

"I always say, mother," said Frances, "that we should lead a much pleasanter life if we let this house for the season and took a house in the country from Easter till October, instead of depending on our friends for invitations."

"Well, we can't do that now, at any rate," said Nellie. "My idea is that Frances and I should go and spend the month of August with Cousin Laura at Anerley. I know they can't go away this year till September, and she would be delighted to have us."

"I think it would be a capital plan for Frances," said Lady Langholme. "But it would be dull for you. And though Cousin Laura might be glad to have one of you, she mightn't care to have both."

"If she can only have one," said Nellie, "it must be me."

"Why are you so anxious to go to Cousin Laura's?" Frances asked when the two sisters were alone.

"Because our shy Australian lives almost next door to her. I'll give him up to you, Frances, if you want him, but as you don't, I may as well keep him to play with while I make up my mind."

"You are behaving very badly," replied Frances. "It may be fun to you—but —"

"It's death to him," interrupted Nellie, laughing. "Frances! Do you think it *is* death to him?"

"I think you have no right to go to Anerley unless you mean to marry him, and are sure mother will let you do it."

"I am sure mother won't let me. But if I decide on doing it, I will soon settle her."

"I shall not go to Anerley if I can help it," said Frances. "I have been stuffed down Mr. Fanshawe's throat more than enough."

Frances, however, could not help it. Cousin Laura expressed great delight at the idea of having both girls, and nothing else offered.

The day the arrangement was concluded Mr. Fanshawe called, and it was imparted to him.

"I'm so sorry," he said.

"How civil you are," cried Nellie.

"Because I shan't be there. I have settled to go to Switzerland in August."

"Oh, go to Switzerland in September. I counted on having you to show us about the Crystal Palace and help us to improve our minds."

"Improve your minds? With the open-air ballets and the variety entertainments?"

"I don't know what with, but I always thought the Crystal Palace was meant to improve people's minds. At any rate, we shall want you there. I can assure you September is just as good a time for Switzerland."

"It is not," said Frances, "nearly so good a time, while a London suburb in August is detestable."

He turned to her.

"You advise me not to put off going?"

"Most decidedly I advise you not," she answered.

He said no more on the subject, and other visitors arriving, he presently drifted into a corner with Nellie, and Frances noticed that their conversation seemed very earnest and confidential.

The fifth of August found both sisters established in Mrs Osborne's little house at Anerley.

When they entered the drawing-room dressed for dinner, the first person that greeted them was Mr. Fanshawe.

"So you haven't gone to Switzerland," said Nellie, without exhibiting any great surprise.

"Not yet. I may go to-morrow or the next day, or the day after. But I want to make sure that a London suburb in August is as detestable as Miss Scott says. I have a fancy that under certain circumstances it might be as pleasant as Switzerland."

At this speech Nellie looked down and played with the tassel of her fan.

A London suburb might be detestable in August, but it must be said that two of these three young people seemed to find it delightful.

Mr. Fanshawe spent most of his time with the Miss Scotts at the Crystal Palace, for Mrs. Osborne was the most easy-going of chaperons, and seemed to think that as long as her cousins enjoyed themselves, her duty was done. Therefore she gave Lawrence Fanshawe leave to come and go as he chose, and assured the girls that they sufficiently chaperoned each other when they went with him to the Palace. In vain Frances protested. Nellie coolly asserted her intention of going alone with the shy Australian if Frances would not come. Frances therefore had no alternative left her. And she enjoyed it. It was all so different from the life she was accustomed to lead. She would have enjoyed it very much, she said to herself, if she could have been sure of Nellie's intentions. Her regret at the line Nellie was taking, and her sympathy with Lawrence Fanshawe in the rude awakening which she feared awaited him, made her manner to him much softer, and there being no one now near to force her down his throat, she dropped the deliberate stiffness with which she had hitherto treated him.

So the days went on, till one day Mrs. Osborne awoke to the conviction that perhaps she had been a little too easy-going. She sought a private interview with Frances.

"My dear," she said, "I'm very much afraid Mr. Fanshawe is in love with Nellie."

"Yes," said Frances.

"But you know, my dear, that wasn't at all what was intended. I don't know what your mother will say. She meant *you* to marry him."

"Unfortunately," replied Frances, "Mr. Fanshawe is a gentleman who prefers to choose for himself."

"I don't see why Nellie shouldn't marry him. He is very nice."

"He is quite good enough for Nellie," said Frances, impatiently; "and if she will marry him ——"

"My dear! There surely can be no doubt of that."

"I don't know," sighed Frances. "I don't understand Nellie. She is not behaving like herself. But—Oh, no, as you say, there can be no doubt that she means to marry him. Don't worry yourself, Cousin Laura. Mother will be made to like it."

Mrs. Osborne went away sighing, and Frances hid her face in the sofa cushions and began to cry.

She was recalled to herself, however, by hearing her sister's step outside. She sprang up, and when Nellie came in was apparently engrossed in letter-writing.

Nellie glanced at her studiously-averted head with some curiosity, but made no remark on it.

"Mr. Fanshawe has just been here," she said. "He wants to make up a party for the fireworks to-morrow night. It's some anniversary or centenary or something, and they are going to be unusually magnificent. There will be a tremendous crowd; but that will be all the more fun."

"Nellie," said Frances suddenly, but without looking up from her writing, "I take it for granted you have made up your mind to marry Mr. Fanshawe?"

"No, I haven't."

"But this cannot go on. Cousin Laura has been speaking to me about it. She supposes it almost a settled thing, and is only uneasy as to what mother will say."

Nellie heaved a tremendous sigh.

"How tiresome you all are! Mr. Fanshawe has never proposed to me."

"But you know that he will. What do you mean to say to him?"

"I shall think about that when he does propose," replied Nellie, beginning to laugh.

"Nellie! Nellie! What has come over you? Is it right—is it womanly, to treat a man as you are treating Mr. Fanshawe? And such a man, so upright and honourable, and—and—he is the sort of man to suffer very deeply under such treatment."

Nellie laughed again, and then became suddenly serious.

"No," she said; "you are quite right. I am in a hole; for I

can't marry him, Frances. I—I care for Gerald Rhodes more than ever."

"Oh, Nellie, Nellie! What will you say to Mr. Fanshawe?"

"I won't say anything; I won't let him get to that, Frances!" She knelt beside her sister's chair and laid her head on her arm. "You must help me."

"I!"

"Yes. You can say something to him."

"Oh, no!" cried Frances. "Besides, he is not a man to take his dismissal from any lips but your own."

"I could not face him," said Nellie. "I should be obliged to accept him out of sheer cowardice. You must help me."

Her distress seemed so great that Frances reluctantly promised to give Mr. Fanshawe a hint of how the land really lay.

The following night the two girls, with Mr. and Mrs. Osborne, proceeded to the palace, where they were to find the rest of the party.

Mr. Fanshawe met them, as appointed, just inside the Low Level station.

"I have only been able to get four seats inside," he said; "the rest of us must take our chance on the terrace."

It had been a very sultry day, and now there were unmistakable indications of a storm; therefore some of the party looked rather dismayed at the prospect of the terrace.

"I think the weather will hold up for another hour," Mr. Fanshawe went on. "Only, those of us who are going to the terrace must hurry up or we shall get no places."

"Keep him with you," whispered Nellie to Frances. "Don't let him come near me."

"You are so much afraid of a thunderstorm," said Frances aloud, "that I think you had better go with Mrs. Osborne to the inside places."

Another young lady then declared her terror of thunderstorms, and a young man, who was evidently engaged to her, put in an eager claim to the fourth place, on the plea that they would need a man's protection in struggling with the crowd.

"It is a fearful crowd," said Frances to Mr. Fanshawe as, after agreeing all to meet under the organ directly the fireworks were over, the rest of the party hurried towards the terrace.

"It is," he answered; "in fact, there is no chance of our not losing each other unless we agree to keep in twos and twos. May I have the privilege of taking entire charge of you?"

Frances gave the required permission with her usual indifference, but was rather surprised to find in less than five minutes that it had been apparently a necessary precaution. The crowd on the steps leading to the first terrace was dense, and only a narrow passage was kept clear by policemen for ascending and descending.

When they reached the terrace, where the people were flitting thither and hither like a swarm of bees, the rest of their party were nowhere to be seen.

"It does not matter," said Mr. Fanshawe. "We shall find them when we want them, under the organ. In the meantime we had better take our seats."

This, however, proved to be an impossibility. When they applied at the little gate of one of the enclosures where the outside seats for the fireworks are placed, they were told that there was not one left. They tried on the other side with the same result.

"I'm awfully sorry," said the young man. "But if you are not tired we shall see just as well from the bank beyond, above the terrace."

"I am not a bit tired," Frances answered. She felt a curious sense of pleasure in this unconventional tête-à-tête. He was not in love with her, she said to herself, and after what she had promised to tell him, the probabilities were she would never see him again. Why, then, should she not yield to the charm of the hour?

Every moment the crowd increased, till they could hardly fight their way along.

"Do you mind taking my arm?" he said. "I think we should get along quicker."

She took it silently.

In a few minutes they reached the place he had spoken of. It commanded a good view of the lower terrace, and was a little less crowded than elsewhere. A distant growl of thunder was heard above the perpetual tramp of feet and hum of voices. The sky grew blacker. The lightning began to play, and the corresponding rolls of thunder to follow more closely upon each flash.

"I almost think we had better try and get into the palace," Mr. Fanshawe said.

He had hardly spoken when the loud report of the introductory rocket was heard. The shower of coloured stars showed for a second against the black sky, and became instantly invisible in a blaze of lightning which seemed to set the whole scene on fire and was accompanied almost simultaneously by a deafening crash of thunder.

Then shrieks of terror arose from the surging crowd, and there was a general rush for the various entrances to the palace. So sudden and so rough was the movement around Mr. Fanshawe and Frances, that she was compelled to cling to his arm to save herself from being thrown down.

The fireworks went resolutely on despite the complete eclipse which they suffered. The brilliant showers of rockets looked mere feeble sparks in the blinding glare of the lightning.

Frances and Mr. Fanshawe made their way as best they could towards the nearest door, but their progress was very slow, so intense was the crush.

"Are you frightened?" he said to her, feeling her hand tremble on his arm.

"I am a little," she confessed. "One feels so helpless in this crowd, and if one were to fall."

They were now on the steps, where the policemen's endeavours to keep a way clear had been completely frustrated.

"You shall not fall," he answered, and quietly putting his arm round her, held her closely in a strong, firm clasp.

She made no resistance. She only vaguely wondered what her sisters would think of her—the proud, unapproachable Frances—if they could see her, and understand her perfect content in this strange position.

By and by they succeeded in getting into the building, and by taking a back way found themselves at the lower end where the courts are situated.

Mr. Fanshawe had released Frances the moment all danger of her being thrown down and trodden on was over. And they now made their way towards the organ. But it became evident that there was no chance of getting near it at present, or of finding their friends. The space was too tightly packed with people for the attempt even.

"When the storm is over they will go out again," said Mr. Fanshawe, "and then we may find our party."

So they wandered back again to the deserted, dimly-lit courts, and studied specimens of renaissance art.

"When are you going to Switzerland?" Frances suddenly asked.

"Why?" he said. "Are you going to advise me again to go?"

"Yes," she answered, steadily, "I am."

"Ah, no," he began. "But—yes. I will go to-morrow. I shall never have another night like this. Better that nothing should mar the memory of it."

Frances hardly heard him. She was training herself for her task.

"I think for your own sake you had better go. Nellie—Nellie is full of spirits and she does not think—she—she does not mean to flirt, but——"

"You mean," he said, "that Nellie will refuse me if I ask her?"

"Yes," she faltered. "Oh, I am so sorry, so sorry."

Her eyes were full of tears; her nerves were shaken by the events of the night, and she was less mistress of herself than usual.

"You are sorry for me," he said, rather bitterly, "because you think I love Nellie and she does not love me. Nellie has certainly not behaved well—from your point of view."

"I am so sorry, so sorry," Frances repeated, covering her face with her hands and sobbing.

"Will you do something to prove your sorrow?" he said at last, after watching her for some seconds. "It is but a little thing. Only to forgive me."

"To forgive you!" Frances said, wonderingly. "What for?"

"For a piece of presumption I am ashamed to confess. I don't know," he went on, "how you came to believe I was in love with your sister."

Frances started, and her face flushed.

"But I am going to give you a proof that it is not so, and then—bid you good-bye." He drew from round his neck a thin gold chain, slipped something off it and put it into Frances's hand.

It was her own lost seal ring.

Some instinct had once told Frances that the shy Australian was concerned in its disappearance, but later events had contradicted the supposition.

She stood and looked at it now in silence, trembling with conflicting emotions, of which anger was certainly one.

He looked at her deprecatingly; and, as she did not speak, he began to explain:

"I picked up your glove one day under the dinner-table, and put it in my pocket. I meant to keep it—for I already——" he glanced at her face, and reading no encouragement in it, left that sentence unfinished, and continued: "You were so cold and haughty that night that I had changed my mind and resolved I would think of you no more. I gave you back the glove before I left the house. When I got home I found to my surprise this ring in my pocket. I had noticed it on your finger, and noticed, too, that it was too big for you. I guessed that you must have drawn it off with your glove, and that it fell out of the glove in my pocket. It seemed an omen. I vowed I would not return the ring till you should willingly give me permission to keep it. But you have never given me a chance even to begin to win that permission. So there is your ring. I only ask you to forgive me."

He waited. But she still stood silent, looking at the ring.

"Surely you may forgive me. It is not much to ask out of all I want—and then I will trouble you no more."

"I forgive you," she said at last, in low, broken tones; "and—and—you may keep the ring."

"How could you play me such a trick?" said Frances to Nellie, when the sisters were alone that night, exchanging confidences.

"I behaved very well," answered Nellie. "I never gave him the least hint that you were to be had for the asking. And if, because he and I became such friends discussing my poor Gerald's prospects, people chose to think we were flirting, I can't help it. Oh, Frances, he has offered Gerald a splendid appointment on his own sheep farm in Australia. And you and I will be married on the same day, and we will all go out together."

So the shy Australian won his prize by a stroke of his usual audacity, and Lady Langholme now holds suburban balls in high respect.

POET LEONARD.

POET LEONARD is so clever,
 He can hear the grass a-growing ;
 Knows the story of the river
 Through the pleasant meadows flowing.
 Knows what piping blackbird sings
 To his mate in green recesses—
 He has learnt a thousand things
 That none other knows or guesses.

Daisies lift their starry faces
 Smiling broadly up to greet him ;
 Bees and butterflies run races
 Which shall be the first to meet him ;
 Squirrel talks to him in words
 Up amid the branches swinging—
 And in chorus clear the birds
 Teach him all their arts of singing.

In his ear the nesting thrushes
 Tell the number of their darlings ;
 To him small hedge-sparrow rushes
 To complain about the starlings ;
 Wren and lark and linnet gay
 Call to him from leafy hollows,
 And at sunset round his way
 Skim in circling flight the swallows.

In his brown Franciscan habit,
 Cropping tender juicy grasses
 At his ease, the nimble rabbit
 Only nods when Leonard passes ;
 Early violet, primrose sweet,
 First to him the Spring discloses,
 And for him 'mid Summer's heat
 Blush the latest July roses.

Poet Leonard's ten brief summers
 Have been spent in field and wild wood,
 Nature in her varying humours
 Links herself with all his childhood.
 Bird and beast in toil and play
 Preach to him their glad evangels,
 And about him day by day
 Company the unseen angels.

Thus another Master-singer
 Shall make glad this world bereaven
 In the years to come, the bringer
 Of a message down from Heaven.
 Earth with mystery is rife,
 Wisdom gropes and fain would know it—
 God unlocks the doors of life
 To the child-heart of the Poet.

CHRISTIAN BURKE.



